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Security Council

Seventy-second year

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Tuesday, 17 January 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Skoog	(Sweden)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Sadykov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Argentina, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India, Indonesia, Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Morocco, Norway, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Venezuela to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mladenov is joining us today via video-teleconference from Jerusalem.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following individuals to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. João Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, and His Excellency Mr. Dian Triansyah Djani, Vice-Chairman, Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: I report to the Security Council today in the aftermath of the appalling truck-ramming attack on 8 January that killed four Israelis and injured 17 others in Jerusalem. Such attacks can never be justified and must be universally condemned. This act of cowardice was neither courageous nor heroic. Such terrorist attacks must be unequivocally condemned by all. It is regrettable that some Palestinian factions and leaders have chosen to praise the attack, to glorify it or simply to ignore it.

Despite the relative tranquility of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict compared to developments in the region, the spectre of violence is always near. Leaders on all sides have a responsibility to reduce tensions and provide a political horizon to their people. Most importantly, we all have a responsibility to prevent the conflict from being engulfed in the nexus of violent extremism and religious turmoil that is sweeping across the Middle East.

In this first briefing to the Security Council in 2017, I would like to begin by honouring the critical efforts of the United Nations country team on the ground. The United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, which work in a challenging security and political environment, deserve our full support and recognition. Every day, the United Nations provides free basic education to over 300,000 students in 350 schools and family health services to almost 1.7 million people in 64 health centres. Every month, we deliver an average of 780,000 litres of fuel to sustain health, water and sanitation, and municipal services. Every quarter, the United Nations provides food assistance to 1 million Palestinian refugees in Gaza and the West Bank.

Yet, we also plan for the future. The United Nations in Palestine implements programmes that will bring about sustainable solutions to the economic challenges facing Palestinian households. United Nations programmes have supported the Palestinian Government in the creation of approximately 14,000 businesses and 45,000 jobs for people who were previously reliant on humanitarian assistance. We help strengthen Palestinian institutions and prepare them for the future. The United Nations facilitates emergency preparedness and regional disaster-risk cooperation between Jordanian, Israeli and Palestinian emergency authorities.

The services that we provide to Palestinians touch thousands of lives across the West Bank and Gaza. This vital work would have been impossible without the cooperation and support of both Israeli and Palestinian authorities and our counterparts. On behalf of the teams on the ground, I would like to thank the Security Council and all Member States for their invaluable and continuing support.

In the Council, I have repeatedly warned that the failure of leaders on both sides to reverse the current negative trajectory will ensure that Israelis and Palestinians continue to live as prisoners of fear, trapped in a perpetual cycle of conflict. On 23 December, the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016). It reiterated some of the key obstacles to achieving a negotiated two-State solution that were also identified in the July 2016 report of the Middle East Quartet, namely, the construction and expansion of illegal settlements; continued acts of violence and terrorism; and incitement.

The international community has clearly said that both sides must do their part in creating the necessary conditions to launch final status direct negotiations. It has called on Israel to demonstrate its commitment to the two-State solution by ceasing settlement activities and by implementing policy shifts consistent with prior agreements. It has called on the Palestinian leadership to demonstrate its commitment to a peaceful two-State future by clearly condemning all acts of terrorism and taking significant steps to curb incitement. Such steps by both sides would have a powerful and positive impact on the prospects for peace. The Middle East Quartet has been calling for such steps — a call that the Security Council and the international community has now welcomed. In the aftermath of the vote, emotions on the ground have been heightened. Calls have been made for the annexation of parts of or the whole of Area C. Such divisive positions risk destroying the prospects for peace. All stakeholders must avoid any unilateral action that would prejudge a negotiated final status solution.

Last weekend in Paris, France hosted over 70 countries and international organizations, not to impose conditions on Israelis and Palestinians but to reaffirm our collective support for the two-State solution and our readiness to support both parties in returning to meaningful negotiations. In particular, I note and appreciate the participants' welcoming of the Quartet recommendations.

While these political developments were unfolding abroad, important events were taking place on the ground. After a relative lull, during the reporting period Israel conducted 24 demolitions, resulting in the displacement of 167 persons in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Yesterday the Israel Defense Forces fatally shot a 17-year-old Palestinian during clashes near Bethlehem. I reiterate that live fire should be used only as a last resort in situations of imminent threat of death or serious injury. Such incidents where use of force has resulted in death or injury must be properly investigated.

Turning to internal Palestinian developments, the reported revocation in December of the parliamentary immunity of five Fatah-bloc members in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) renewed debate about the legality of the decision to lift parliamentary immunity in the absence of regular PLC meetings. Palestine has come a long way on its path towards building State institutions. Safeguarding their independence and checks and balances is vital to maintaining the public's trust.

Much-needed preparations have begun on holding a regular session of the Palestinian National Council, which was last convened some two decades ago. I encourage all factions to seize this opportunity to achieve genuine reconciliation on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization principles. Russia's recent initiative in Moscow, which provided a forum for Palestinian factions to hold open discussions, is also a welcome effort in that direction.

In Gaza, I remain greatly concerned by increasing tensions exacerbated by the continued closures and the protracted humanitarian and development situation. I am particularly concerned by Hamas' crackdown on recent peaceful protests after 2 million Palestinians were left with just a couple of hours of electricity per day in the middle of winter. The right to freedom of expression, peaceful protest and assembly in Gaza must be respected fully by all. While the immediate electricity crisis has been averted thanks to the generous and timely support of the State of Qatar, the responsible authorities must find a suitable, long-term solution to resolve the chronic electricity shortage. The United Nations is working to support such efforts.

Against that backdrop, there have also been some positive developments. Israel has increased the entry of critical construction materials into Gaza in recent weeks, but donor funds for shelter remain critically low. The current $300-million reconstruction gap is far too large. Less than half of the $3.5 billion that were committed two and a half years ago at the Cairo Gaza pledging conference have been disbursed.

Turning to Lebanon, the formation of a Government on 18 December 2016 was a positive development. It sustained the momentum of the appointment of Saad

Hariri as Prime Minister on 3 November and the election of President Aoun on 31 October. The President visited Saudi Arabia in early January at the invitation of King Salman. The visit paves the way for new engagement and support for Lebanon's stability and security. Both sides have described the meeting as successful and as opening a new page.

The Government has outlined its priorities and vision for the country, reflecting its determination to tackle Lebanon's urgent challenges. These moves signal cautious optimism and the potential for consolidating Lebanese institutions. Meanwhile, the Lebanese Armed Forces successfully foiled an attack and arrested 11 members of a terrorist cell in Tripoli that was linked with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and the Al-Nusra Front.

On the Golan, the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic has continued to affect significantly the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) area of operation. The ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic generally has been maintained, albeit in a highly volatile security environment. The Secretary-General calls on all parties to prevent tensions or their escalation, and to strictly abide by international law, particularly in respect of territorial integrity and sovereignty of all countries of the region. Both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic have stated their continued commitment to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. The full return of UNDOF to the area of separation remains a priority for the Mission.

The long, bloody history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has offered us many lessons, some of which we have learned but too many that we have not. One lesson that we should all have learned by now is that opportunities to advance peace are rare and must be seized. Making the necessary compromises will never be easy. In recent weeks, the international community has expressed its continued commitment to the two-State solution, but resolutions and communiqués alone will not achieve a just and lasting peace. What is required is action, first and foremost on the part of the parties themselves. The United Nations remains committed to supporting Israelis and Palestinians on the difficult road ahead.

The President: I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): On behalf of the State of Palestine, I extend our warm congratulations to the friendly country of Sweden on its election to the Security Council, and we thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate under Sweden's presidency. We thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing at the outset of this debate. I also extend our sincere congratulations to the other newly elected members of the Council — Bolivia, Ethiopia, Italy and Kazakhstan — and wish them all success, confident in their commitment to upholding their responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations. We also renew our deep appreciation to the countries and delegations of Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain and Venezuela upon the completion of their Council terms, during which they served with exemplary dedication and skill, contributing to the Council's efforts to address the many critical issues on its agenda, including the question of Palestine, as most recently reflected in the important action taken by the Security Council, on 23 December 2016, with the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), which, inter alia, reaffirms in unequivocal terms the principles that are at the heart of Palestinian-Israeli peace and are a matter of international consensus.

In the few weeks since its adoption, much has been said about resolution 2334 (2016). Analysis has emerged from all corners of the globe, both on the resolution's content and the broader circumstances leading to its adoption by the Council with near unanimity. While widely viewed as long overdue, it has been deemed extremely necessary.

The majority have stressed the resolution's significance, politically and legally, and the chance it provides for rectifying course to salvage the two-State solution on the 1967 lines and to open a path towards ending the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, justly resolving the question of Palestine in all aspects and ultimately making Palestinian-Israeli peace a reality. That is at the core of the unanimous welcome for the resolution, with the exception of Israel and a few of its supporters, to whom it must be again clarified: resolution 2334 (2016) is not anti-Israel; it is anti-settlements, anti-violence, anti-human rights violations. As such, resolution 2334 (2016) is clearly pro-peace, pro-international law and pro-two-States, and thus pro-Palestine and pro-Israel. Moreover, resolution 2334 (2016) cannot by any sense of reason be characterized as one- sided. The law — on which the resolution is firmly based — is universal and fair and can never be biased. That is a fact and the lifeline of our international system.

In that way, the Council's adoption of the resolution has not only revived hope in peace prospects but has, more broadly, revived convictions in international law and the Council's own credibility. That is no small feat against a backdrop of crises undermining belief in international law, especially among younger generations. For them, ongoing injustice and the failure to bring them peace, security and prosperity only further deepen despair and anger and heighten their vulnerability to radicalizing forces.

The opportunity to underscore the law's applicability and strengthen its respect must therefore not be lost in the commotion of noise by Israel, the occupying Power, or its intimidation of those seeking to uphold it, as heard so aggressively in this Chamber on 23 December (see S/PV.7852) and thereafter by Israeli officials, who have reacted to resolution 2334 (2016) with extreme hostility and rejection. The stakes are too high — the possibility of peace in the present, but also our collective future — and must be prioritized.

We believe it is precisely for that reason that the grounding of resolution 2334 (2016) in the law and its commitment to peace has been so widely and strongly welcomed. Yet that is also the very same reason that the Israeli Government, which has always sought to impose might over right, has so fiercely opposed the resolution, preferring instead to persist with its empty rhetoric and legal acrobatics to justify its continuing illegal colonization of the Palestinian land and oppression of the Palestinian people, in flagrant contempt of the law and the international community.

The will of the Council, and of the international community as a whole, to stand by the resolution and implement its provisions will be an indicator of whether the two-State solution can be saved or not and whether peace will be possible or not.

To the few appalled by the fact that the Security Council dared to adopt resolution 2334 (2016), we say: read the resolution and its clear call for peace. Read the Charter of the United Nations, beginning with the purposes and principles defined in Article 1, including the maintenance of international peace and security in conformity with the principles of justice and international law and upholding the right of peoples to self-determination, and Article 2, stipulating, inter alia, that all Members shall abide in good faith with the obligations assumed under the Charter and shall give the United Nations every assistance in any action it takes in accordance with the Charter. Recall also Article 6, which states that a Member persistently violating Charter principles may be expelled from the Organization. Compliance with Security Council resolutions is thus clearly obligatory, regardless of whether it is under Chapter VI or VII.

The adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) represents a turning point. It is a moment of truth. Israel, the occupying Power, must choose between occupation and peace. They are mutually exclusive and cannot coexist. It is time for Israel to choose whether the two-State solution will become reality or whether history will be set on a different course. In that regard, the international community has repeatedly affirmed that settlement activities are illegal, are destroying the two-State solution and call into question Israel's commitment to achieving a just, negotiated peace. Resolution 2334 (2016) has made clear once again that the law cannot accommodate unlawful policies and schemes; on the contrary, it is Israel that must change and must comply with the law. The absurd notion being entertained by some quarters in Israel, including by the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, that instead of abiding by the law, the law can be twisted and distorted to bless Israel's illegal actions must be exposed and dismissed.

It must be firmly stated that halting settlement activities should never be seen as a concession or precondition; it is about fundamental respect for the law. The law prohibits all activities aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of occupied territory, all of which resolution 2334 (2016) unequivocally reaffirms. The demand on Israel to cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and abide by its legal obligations is explicit. Settlement construction and expansion, the construction of the wall, the displacement of Palestinian civilians and all other such illegal actions must stop and be reversed. That must take effect immediately. Salvaging the two-State solution is dependent upon it, as is the prospect for peace.

It is time for the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and all of its provisions. Follow-up must begin immediately and all must uphold their obligations, including each and every member of the Security Council. It is their resolution, and it is their duty to ensure that it is fully implemented. The demands and obligations upon Israel, the occupying Power, are clear and it must be held accountable. The Security Council must implement its resolutions, without exception.

States also have clear individual and collective responsibilities. In that regard, we highlight the call upon all States in paragraph 5 to distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. In that regard, the Council rightly reaffirmed that it will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed to by the parties through negotiations. We appeal to all States to uphold their obligations not to assist in the perpetuation of the illegal situation and to accord full respect to the Council's decision. In that regard, neither the existence nor the lack of bilateral negotiations can exempt States and international bodies from assuming their responsibilities.

The Secretary-General is also requested to report to the Council every three months on the implementation of the provisions of the resolution. We look forward to the publication of his periodic reports and to serious consideration by the Security Council as we seek to continue moving towards a peaceful solution. In that connection, we wish to laud Secretary-General António Guterres for declaring the pursuit of peace the hallmark of his administration and express our confidence in his leadership and our full commitment and cooperation to that most noble end.

Of course, the Palestinian Government pledges its respect for resolution 2334 (2016) and its commitment to peace, international law, the two-State solution, non-violence and to combating terrorism. Furthermore, we reaffirm the readiness to abide by our obligations to the best of our ability, bearing in mind the very serious obstacles we face under Israel's occupation. We also reaffirm our readiness to continue cooperating with all international and regional efforts to advance just peace and appeal for the intensification of such efforts and support to the parties, as called for by the resolution.

We understand the need for negotiations and have repeatedly engaged in good faith in direct negotiations, to no avail. Palestine has supported every single recent peace effort, while Israel has rejected those efforts and reprimanded countries initiating or supporting them. We said yes to Paris, yes to Moscow and yes to resolution 2334 (2016), just as we said yes to the 1967 borders as a historic compromise, and to the terms of reference of the peace process as per international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and Quartet road map, which were all opposed, ignored or violated and undermined by Israel. That is why international involvement is indispensable.

In that regard, we welcome the convening by France of the Middle East Peace Conference on 15 January to harness international support to preserve the two-State solution and promote peace. The Paris Conference underscored the urgency, inter alia, of restoring a credible horizon for meaningful peace negotiations and reaffirmed the role of multilateral diplomacy for addressing challenges in the Middle East and beyond. We hope it will serve as impetus for continued global efforts for peace, including in terms of the efforts of the League of Arab States, the Quartet, Egypt and the Russian Federation, as well as the significant statement made on 28 December 2016 by the United States Secretary of State.

The 1967 borders are the delineating line between conflict and peace. We are fast approaching a point of no return. The implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) is the way back from the brink, providing the means to ensure an end to the Israeli occupation, the realization by the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination in an independent, sovereign, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, living side by side with Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders and in peace and security, and a just solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees. The international community must act now to revive the possibility of peace.

In this year marking 70 years since the partition, 50 years since the onset of Israel's occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, which remains under an inhumane Israeli blockade, and 50 years since the Security Council's adoption of resolution 242 (1967), we will either save the two-State solution or we may have to bury it. Let us seize this opportunity to usher in a new era for Palestinian-Israeli peace, Arab-Israeli peace and global peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): I would like to welcome the new members of the Security Council that joined this month: Ethiopia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Sweden and Bolivia. I would also like to recognize Sweden on assuming the presidency of the Council this month. Israel looks forward to working with all members during their time on the Security Council.

Last month, the Council voted to adopt resolution 2334 (2016). Immediately following the voting, the Chamber erupted into applause, with almost every nation represented voicing its approval over a resolution that condemns Israel. The vote was also welcomed by some around the world. Here are two examples: first,

> "We welcome this important transformation and development in international provisions supporting Palestinian rights in international forums"

and, secondly,

> "There is an international public opinion against Israel and its policies and it has become possible to isolate, boycott and pursue Israel in international forums for the crimes and aggression it commits".

The first quote was uttered by a Hamas spokesperson; The second one was from the Islamic Jihad. Both of these organizations have injured and killed countless innocent Israelis. Both are recognized as murderous terrorist organizations by the United States, the European Union and many other countries, and both are openly committed to the destruction of the State of Israel.

Last week a Palestinian terrorist used his truck to drive into a group of soldiers who were visiting Jerusalem as part of an educational seminar. They had gathered at a site where Jews, Christians and Muslims come to take in the beautiful vistas of Jerusalem. The terrorist drove his truck back and forth, killing four Israelis and injuring dozens of others. We appreciate the strong words used by the Council, the Secretary-General and others in condemning this act of Palestinian terror. Palestinian President Abbas, on the other hand, has once again remained silent. Nothing.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad celebrated this despicable act. They gave out candy in Gaza in honour of the murder of innocent Israelis. These are the entities that joined the Council in welcoming resolution 2334 (2016). That resolution declared that our presence in Jerusalem is illegal. It encouraged the Palestinians to continue to avoid negotiations and inspired the terrorist in Jerusalem.

And this was the result: Shir Hajaj, Yael Yekutiel, Erez Orbach and Shira Tzur were murdered by a Palestinian who was led to believe that he could use terror and violence to remove the Jewish people from Jerusalem. He will not succeed.

Let us take a few minutes to better understand this resolution, which was supported by Hamas. It is particularly appalling that, among its many biased and false clauses, the resolution, in paragraph 1, designates Israel's presence in the parts of Jerusalem which were liberated in 1967 as "a flagrant violation under international law".

Let me remind the Council that this includes Jerusalem's Old City and Jewish Quarter, and it also includes the holy Western Wall that sits at the heart of Jerusalem. This Wall is a remnant of our Temple, which was first built on the mount above by King Solomon almost 3,000 years ago. Yes, the same Temple Mount which the Council refuses to call by its historic name. King Solomon famously noted that "there is nothing new under the sun". His words of wisdom still ring true today.

In the year 587 B.C.E., the Babylonians destroyed the first temple and exiled my people from Jerusalem. But the Jewish people returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the Temple. In the year 70, the Ancient Roman Empire succeeded in destroying the Second Temple and sent us into our long exile. The physical destruction of Jerusalem was not enough for the Romans; they even renamed the land of Israel "Palestine" in an attempt to erase any trace of our connection to our birthright. But all of these attempts, and many more, failed to break the bond between the people of Israel and Jerusalem.

Today, I represent not only the State of Israel, but the 16 million Jews worldwide who pray and yearn for Jerusalem. Those who came before us prevailed over the attempts to remove us from Jerusalem, and we, too, shall overcome empty statements and resolutions.

For Israel, peace is not a convenient ploy that we raise in international forums; it is an essential part of all of our prayers. This is why Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeated his call time and again for President Abbas to meet with him directly for genuine negotiations. Prime Minister Netanyahu's offer still stands today, and he is willing to meet in Jerusalem, Ramallah or even here in New York to enter into a real dialogue.

We know that neither speeches nor statements will bring peace to our region. The only way forward is for the Palestinians to understand that they must condemn terror, yes, condemn terror, end incitement and return to the negotiating table.

It saddens me, however, to report that last month's resolution has set us back in the pursuit of peace. The message emanating from this Chamber, from the current Administration in Washington, D.C., and now from Paris is exactly the opposite. It has encouraged the Palestinians to continue down the dangerous path that they have chosen. The day after the Security Council vote, Fatah, the movement of Mahmoud Abbas, posted a cartoon on its official Facebook page. It showed a dagger in the shape of a map of Israel coloured with the Palestinian flag. Not Judea and Samaria; what some call the West Bank. All of Israel. Under the dagger was a pool of blood, and next to it said, "Thank you" and listed each Council member who voted for that shameful resolution.

The Council may have thought that the resolution would send a message to Israel, but instead it sent a message to the Palestinians. They now understand that they should continue to spread the lie that the Western Wall is not sacred to the Jewish people but, rather, occupied territory. They now understand they should continue to teach their children that Tel Aviv is really "Tel al-Rabia". And they now understand that they should continue to raise the next generation of Palestinians to believe that instead of a people who have returned to their homeland, Zionism represents a foreign occupying Power that must be overthrown.

This is why the Palestinian Foreign Minister's immediate reaction to the resolution and Secretary Kerry's speech was to declare "No to Israel as a Jewish State". In this rare moment of honesty, the Palestinian leader admitted that this conflict was not about so-called settlements but about the refusal to accept the Jewish State of Israel, in any borders.

By saying "no" to Israel as the nation State of the Jewish people, the Palestinians are saying that their end game is not to create a State alongside Israel but rather to replace it completely. That is why they continue to turn to international bodies instead of negotiating directly with Israel. They believe that they can accomplish all they seek without making the concessions needed to really put an end to this conflict. Just two days ago, a conference was convened in Paris to supposedly further the cause of peace. This gathering took place despite Prime Minister Netanyahu's calls to hold a meeting with President Abbas instead of a useless conference. More than 70 nations met in the City of Light without our presence to discuss how we should make peace. What arrogance!

It is because Israel wants to see real diplomatic progress that the actions of the United Nations are so dangerous. For years we have sounded the alarm alerting the Council of the various bodies and agencies which, under the pretence of assisting the Palestinian people, really serve as mechanisms to delegitimize Israel. They present a biased, one-sided narrative of the conflict and encourage the Palestinian leaders to continue to hold their people hostage and avoid the steps needed to promote real peace.

In the wake of the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) last month, we have decided that enough is enough. Israel has initiated a reassessment of its relationship with a number of United Nations organizations. Our first step is to suspend more than $6 million from our annual contributions to the United Nations for 2017. That amount represents the portion of the United Nations budget allocated to anti-Israel bodies that represent the United Nations double standard when it comes to Israel. Those organizations inject anti-Israel sentiments and prejudice into the United Nations system, harm its credibility and violate the principles on which the United Nations itself was founded.

All we need do is look at just one example. The Division for Palestinian Rights is a prime example of a United Nations body focused solely on promoting the Palestinian narrative while delegitimizing Israel. That division spends more than $1.3 million on travel alone. The sum of $1.3 million could have been used to promote dialogue and understanding but was instead spent on touring the world in an organization that has 16 employees. Those millions of dollars should be going to make the world a safer and more secure place for our children but are instead being spent on spreading hatred and even blatant anti-Semitism. The steps that we are taking should be seen as an act of protest. It is our sincere hope that the message that we are sending will be heard and that this organ will take the necessary steps to fundamentally change the way in which it operates.

Despite the events of the past few weeks, we remain hopeful. We are hopeful because with every new composition of the Security Council, there is a chance that the members will stake a new and honest course by actually encouraging peace in our region rather than continuing down the path of assigning one-sided blame only on Israel. We are hopeful because a new Secretary-General has taken office and with him comes the possibility of a wind of change. That can be an opportunity for the United Nations to institute real reforms, return to its founding principles and "unite our strength to maintain international peace and security", pursuant to the second preambular paragraph of the Charter of the United Nations. We are also hopeful because a new American President will take office in three days. With that new Administration comes the hope that the United States will return to its policy of rejecting unfair and biased Security Council resolutions and of promoting direct and genuine dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians.

Finally, we are hopeful because we are armed with thousands of years of history behind us and the innovative, vibrant and moral modern State of Israel before us, and because, as Rabbi Yehoshua Weitzman so poetically described the strength of the Jewish people, "the eternal people does not fear a long journey".

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): On Sunday 15 January, more than 70 countries and international organizations met in Paris to speak as one for the revival of the Middle East peace process. On behalf of the President of the Republic, Mr François Hollande, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Jean-Marc Ayrault, I would like to reiterate France's gratitude to all partners who participated in that meeting and contributed their ideas to and encouraged a process that was initiated by French officials nearly a year ago. That same process, which was marked by the international conferences held on 3 June and 15 January, had three main goals that are reflected in the joint communiqué adopted in Paris this past Sunday.

The first goal was to urgently reinsert the Arab-Israeli conflict into the list of the international community's top priorities. Failure to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict poses a permanent threat to international security. It is true that the Arab-Israeli conflict has not been the most deadly conflict in the Middle East in recent years, but the elements that have already led to three wars over the course six years continue to be present today and could, at any moment, lead once again to a flare up either in Jerusalem, Gaza or the West Bank. Owing to its highly symbolic importance, the conflict, which has remained unresolved for more than 70 years, amply extends beyond Israeli borders and Palestinian territories, and every escalation carries a risk of uncontrollable regional destabilization. That is why we cannot accept the status quo — a euphemism that, in reality, underlies the daily deterioration of the situation on the ground and in attitudes.

The second goal of the French-led process was aimed at reaffirming a common understanding of the key component, namely the commitment to the two-State solution that is inextricably linked to the condemnation of settlement policy and the unequivocal condemnation of terrorism and violence. The reaffirmation of the preeminence of the two-State solution is at the heart of the joint statement made on 15 January and is more than ever our unique common goal. It is all the more important and urgent to reaffirm that common priority as the realization of the two-State solution is increasingly faced with the threat of disappearing like a mirage in the desert, while no credible alternative exists that can satisfy the aspirations of the two parties. Let us not forget that the best guarantee for Israel's security — to which, as everyone knows, France is committed — is a just peace with the Palestinians through the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian State and, therefore, the two-State solution.

In that context, the Paris joint declaration recalls the fundamental principles to which we are all beholden: an international framework for all future agreements, the pre-1967 borders and the relevant Security Council resolutions. The preservation of the two-State solution is also the goal of resolution 2334 (2016), which is an important resolution that the ongoing advances in settlement policy have made urgent and necessary.

The third objective of our initiative was to take a positive and encouraging approach towards the resumption of talks. To that end, we have engaged with all the concerned steak holders to work meaningfully together towards defining positive incentives with all our voluntary partners. I thank in particular Sweden, Germany, Norway and the European Commission for their tireless commitment in that regard. Those incentives are based on three main aspects: first, an economic component, including a special privileged partnership with the European Union and the enhanced participation of the private sector, which is absolutely key; secondly, building the institutional and State capacities of the Palestinian side; and thirdly the rapprochement of Israeli and Palestinian civil societies, in order to improve necessary dialogue between the parties, to revive the public debate and to bring together two societies that are destined to coexist. The goal of those incentives is to remind the parties the extent of their interest in obtaining peace and to what degree the international community can and wants to help them to that end.

The joint declaration of the Conference of 15 January is the result of long-term effort and great collective mobilization. It has benefited from the efforts of all parties, including the Quartet, the Arab Peace Initiative, the initiatives of Russia and Egypt and the essential role of the United States. There has been complete transparency towards all of the parties. Therefore, the parties must show their commitment to the two-State solution through specific action on the ground.

As has been stated time and again by the French authorities, it has never been a question of dictating the terms of the peace agreement. Only direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine can lead to peace. Nonetheless, the international community has an irreplaceable role to play in creating, by means of guarantees and encouragement, an appropriate framework and favourable conditions for negotiations to start once again. That is the thinking behind the French initiative and the Paris conference, which is a friendly hand held out to the parties. In that context, the joint declaration of 15 January is not the end of the road. It is a necessary and important step towards relaunching the peace process. The situation on the ground demands that we remain more than ever active in helping the parties move quickly towards a settlement.

The heinous attack on Jerusalem on 8 January, which cost the lives of four young Israeli soldiers and which France strongly condemned, shows us the extent to which the situation on the ground remains precarious. As the joint communiqué of Paris states, we must demonstrate a spirit of responsibility and vigilance, and must avoid any unilateral act because that would only further exacerbate the situation on the ground in Jerusalem and elsewhere.

We must remain active with a view to resuming negotiations and that is why the participants in the Paris conference have committed to meet again during the year to review the progress being made and to move forward. The objective is to re-establish a positive political dynamic founded on the two-State solution, which is the only way to respond to the legitimate aspirations of both parties and to ensure that Palestinians and Israelis are able to live side by side in peace and security. We call for the unswerving commitment of all our partners, in particular the members of the Security Council, in order to press on together along this rocky road.

Let us take on together the historic responsibility that falls to us in the service of peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin my statement by welcoming the holding of this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including Palestine. I would also like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing, which reminds us that our meeting today is taking place in a very disturbing context in which the situation on the ground is volatile, there is an ongoing unacceptable building of settlements and violence; as well as a very difficult humanitarian situation; in particular in Gaza.

However, in spite of these obstacles, the past year has been marked by the ongoing commitment of the international community to peace in the Middle East. Indeed, from the French initiative, which the Permanent Representative of France referred to quite elegantly, to the efforts of stakeholders in the region, including Egypt and the Russian Federation, and the issuance of the Quartet's report (S/2016/595, annex) on the situation on the ground, the international community has shown that it continues to have faith in a two-State solution.

The crowning achievement is that eight years after the most recent action taken on this subject, the Security Council, which has regularly focused on the intensified and accelerated building of settlements, adopted resolution 2334 (2016) last December. The resolution calls for a halt to the settlements, which are deemed illegal from the standpoint of international law and reaffirms the two-State solution as the only way for a positive and lasting outcome to the conflict. The same resolution also invites us to pursue and intensify diplomatic efforts to arrive at a settlement to this dispute, which bears witness to our common commitment to peace in the Middle East.

The peace has been threatened by considerable obstacles, which we are regularly alerted to primarily by the Secretary-General. Among the most disturbing obstacles undoubtedly are the ongoing accelerated building of settlements and the occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which in addition to dangerously imperilling the two-State solution, fuels and spurs on hatred and violence affecting Palestinians and Israelis alike, two peoples who must coexist in peace and security, each within secure and internationally recognized borders.

The most recent tragic illustration of this violence was the attack in Jerusalem, on 8 January. We condemn that attack and all acts of violence or terrorism, regardless of who the perpetrators are or what their motivations are. In order to overcome these obstacles to peace, Senegal, echoing the recommendations of the Quartet's report, urges the parties to put an end to the building of settlements and to related policies, as well as to renounce violence and incitement to hatred. This is what resolution 2334 (2016) calls for in order to prevent acts of violence against civilians, as well as those intended to provoke or cause destruction or terrorist actions, requires that the perpetrators for such actions be brought to justice.

As the report of the Quartet reminds us, we cannot ignore the dangers posed by the precarious situation in Gaza, especially its catastrophic humanitarian dimension, which affects 70 per cent of the nearly 2 million people living there. The demonstrations of the people in Gaza last Sunday against the precariousness of basic social services, especially electricity. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the humanitarian dimension in the occupied territories during the Council's briefings on the Middle East, including Palestine.

We reiterate our appreciation to humanitarian actors, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, for their efforts in support of Palestinian refugees. I urge Member States to continue to provide assistance to that Office, which has just launched an appeal for emergency aid in the amount of $813 million. Beyond the provision of humanitarian aid, we must help restore the Palestinian economy, which is in a very difficult situation, primarily as a result of the occupation, but also as a result of reduced aid from international partners. In this connection, I welcome the fact that the French initiative provides for economic and political incentives to make the two-State solution more attractive and mutually beneficial for Israelis and Palestinians. The same is true of the support needed by the Palestinian Authority in its strategy of building credible institutions and reaffirming the essential role of civil society.

June 2017 will mark the very sad anniversary of 50 years of occupation of the Palestinian territories. However, despite the frustrations that can arise from the lack of tangible progress in the political process and the difficult reality on the ground — frustrations that may lead to discouragement and even cynicism — we have no alternative but to redouble our perseverance and efforts on this issue. In that regard, we reiterate our call on the Israelis and the Palestinians, who in fact are the only parties that can give a real chance to this much-desired peace and work to overcome their differences with a view to achieving a two-State solution on the basis of international law and relevant resolutions.

In conclusion, Senegal, in its capacity as Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, would like to assure these two peoples, with whom we share legitimate aspirations to peace and progress, that it will join the rest of the international community in accompanying them on the path of dialogue and cooperation with a view to definitively resolving this dispute, which is certainly deep but not insurmountable.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): At the outset, please allow me to thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing today and for his relentless efforts on this issue. Through him, I would also like to commend the essential work carried out by all relevant United Nations entities and staff, both at Headquarters and on the ground.

The Paris Middle East Peace Conference, in which Italy took part at the ministerial level, showed the cohesiveness of the international community in keeping the Middle East peace process high on the world agenda. It also confirmed the widely shared commitment to pursuing the goal of a just and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine, based on the two-State solution through direct negotiations.

As indicated by the July 2016 Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex) and Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), facts on the ground are threatening the viability of the two-State formula. Settlements, which have expanded considerably in the past year, as well as increased demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian projects in the occupied territory, including East Jerusalem, are dangerously imperilling the viability of the two-State solution based on the 1967 borders.

Settlements, of course, are not the only obstacle to peace. Let me underline in this regard Italy's deep concern over the risk of growing terrorist violence and incitement on the ground. The recent murderous attack in Jerusalem reminded us of the extreme fragility of the situation and that immediate steps are required to prevent such acts, which must be condemned by all parties, including with active rejection of incitement. If not properly addressed and reversed, those facts on the ground may deepen the political stalemate and lead, both in Israel and in Palestine, as well as in the region, to growing risks of further hatred, intolerance and violent extremism.

The erosion of the two-State solution may leave room for a sort of dangerous one-State illusion, plagued by insecurity and continuous tension. That is neither the end state in which the international community has invested so many political and financial resources nor what Israeli and Palestinian citizens deserve. We think that the parties must take substantial steps to demonstrate their genuine commitment to the re-establishment of a political horizon leading to the resumption of direct negotiations, which shall be the aim of every international effort, bearing in mind that peace cannot be imposed from the outside.

We also believe that the impact of our endeavour will be measured by our capacity to bring the parties back to the negotiating table, to defuse mistrust and to clearly highlight the many dividends of peace. In this vein, I wish to express our appreciation for the work put forward by the outgoing United States Administration in the pursuit of a just peace. We are particularly appreciative of John Kerry's relentless efforts during his tenure as Secretary of State. We are confident that the next Administration of the United States will invest the same political capital and deploy the same efforts for a resolution of the conflict based on the two-State formula. Italy appreciates and further encourages the efforts of the Middle East Quartet, whose recommendations are still fully valid and underscore the importance of the ongoing efforts to advance the Arab Peace Initiative.

Despite some recent encouraging signals, Palestinian national reconciliation remains unaccomplished. Let me underline that the Palestinian reconciliation process is an important element for reaching the two-State solution. Poverty, high unemployment rates — especially among young people — and persisting stagnation of the economy are some of the indicators that show that the daily life of Palestinians is characterized by countless emergencies. As Minister Alfano recently stated in the Council (see S/PV.7857), it is only by addressing the root causes of instability that we can build the peace of tomorrow. There are priorities for socioeconomic development that can no longer be deferred, such as access to water and energy resources. This underscores the urgency of dialogue and concrete cooperation in these fields between Israel, Palestine and relevant neighbouring countries, beside and above political considerations.

The dire humanitarian situation in Gaza must also be concretely and effectively addressed. The reconstruction of the Strip and the improvement of the living conditions of its people cannot wait any longer. In the Council and in other relevant forums, Italy is committed to playing its role to finally and fully put in practice the framework outlined in Oslo more than 20 years ago. There is considerable work to be done in order to rebuild trust between the parties, including by their respective civil societies, and to rehabilitate the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security.

I also wish to mention another country that we consider crucial to regional stability — Lebanon. Italy welcomes the recent election of President Aoun and the formation of the Government led by Prime Minister Hariri, whose declared objective is to restore trust. In the light of our substantial contingent of peacekeepers within the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), we remain strongly committed to upholding stability in Lebanon and will work within the Security Council in order to ensure the broadest international support for the current positive cooperation between Lebanese political forces. UNIFIL's strategic review is also a key opportunity to ensure the effectiveness of the mission, including its essential civilian and maritime components. Weakening them would create dangerous voids.

In this respect, we hope that parliamentary elections in 2017 will mark a significant step forward in strengthening Lebanese democracy and consolidating State institutions. All countries, especially countries of the region, must shoulder their responsibilities in this regard.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to thank you, Sir for organizing this open debate and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing. We reiterate once again Uruguay's total support for his efforts.

In 1947, the General Assembly, including Uruguay, adopted resolution 181 (II), which decreed the partition of Palestine to create an Arab State and a Jewish State. Uruguay voted in favour, convinced that the decision would allow the establishment of two States, Israel and Palestine, that would live in peace withing secure borders. The position of Uruguay has not changed since then.

In the seven decades since the adoption of resolution 181 (II), Israel has established itself as a full, modern State and member of the Organization, while Palestine continues to face serious difficulties in its development and international integration, resulting in serious consequences for its population and an increase of tensions in the whole region. Undoubtedly, this is a particularly relevant time on the long and winding road to peace in the Middle East. The adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) and the recently concluded peace conference in France both clearly indicate the urgency that the international community attaches to the peaceful and successful conclusion of the peace process.

Uruguay reaffirms, as it has since 1947, its unwavering support for the right of Israel and Palestine to live in peace within secure and recognized borders and in an atmosphere of renewed cooperation, free of any threat to peace or acts that could undermine peace. My delegation also reiterates its support for the two independent States solution, as it is convinced that that is the only option that would allow for the peaceful coexistence of Israel and Palestine. In that regard, we call once again for the resumption of direct negotiations between both parties, which is essential to achieving the desired goal. It is crucial that their authorities give clear political signals to each other and to the international community in order to escape the current vicious circle of misunderstandings and violent confrontations between the parties. Similarly, it is necessary that they refrain from unilateral decision-making that could act as a barrier to dialogue, and that they comply in good faith with their obligations under international law and with the relevant Security Council resolutions. Moreover, in the light of several announcements made by key third-party countries to the process, composure and reflection are needed in order to avoid measures that might seriously affect the future of negotiations and the two-State solution.

Last week Uruguay strongly condemned the terrorist attack committed in Jerusalem on 8 January, showing its solidarity with the victims, their families and Israel, and once again reiterating its total rejection of such acts, which pose a serious threat to the peace process in the Middle East. We are distressed and saddened that the Palestinian Authority has not publicly condemned that despicable and cowardly attack. We reiterate that there should be no place for incitement to or glorification of violence. Neither should there be any room for complicit silence.

Uruguay welcomes any initiative that makes it possible to move forward in the search for solutions in the Middle East peace process, with a view to achieving a solution that is peaceful, fair, negotiated and lasting, and that, in accordance with international law, takes into account the legitimate aspirations of both parties. In that framework, Uruguay was among the countries that signed the Paris statement on the peace process last Sunday.

Allow me to mention briefly the conflict in Syria. After several failed initiatives in 2016 to achieve a cessation of violence, the year ended with the adoption of two resolutions that provide a glimpse of hope for the Syrian people. Although those steps are encouraging, there is still a long way to go before we reach the end of that horrendous six-year conflict.

We acknowledge the important step achieved in unanimous adoption of resolution 2328 (2016), which, after several attempts, made it possible to take into account the humanitarian situation in Aleppo and to monitor the evacuation of the inhabitants of that city. We also welcome the adoption, on the last day of the year, of resolution 2336 (2016), and wish to highlight the efforts made by Russia and Turkey, as well as the opportunities that those efforts offer to find a solution to this conflict. Uruguay reaffirms its support for the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura. My delegation trusts that the negotiations that will take place in Astana, Kazakhstan, and in Geneva will yield immediate and effective results. We are certain that the new Secretary-General will continue to work tirelessly to achieve peace in Syria.

Throughout the open debates on the Middle East, in which Uruguay has participated, participants have stressed the pressing need to protect civilians and to allow humanitarian assistance to reach them, as well as the basic care needed to survive the chaotic situation in which civilians find themselves embroiled, in particular the most vulnerable groups. For that reason, we should also not forget the critical situations in Yemen, Iraq and other countries of the region.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Middle East and North Africa region is still experiencing a systemic multilevel crisis. There have been ongoing, bloodthirsty terrorist attacks and other attacks, including the murder of the Russian ambassador in Ankara, Mr. Karlov. There have been explosions in Turkey and Egypt, and the tragedies in Berlin and Jerusalem. They are all evidence that the terrorist threat is global. That, once again, shows the need for a consolidated effort on the part of the international community to form a broad counter-terrorist front. That has been called for time and again by the Russian President, Vladimir Putin. Furthermore, there is a need for measures to achieve a political settlement in a number of conflicts, and for the re-establishment of stability and a peaceful life in the region of the Middle East and North Africa.

The situation on the Palestinian-Israeli track of the Middle Eastern settlement remains tense and explosive, as demonstrated by the periodic spikes in violence, including the 8 January terrorist attack in Jerusalem, in which four Israeli soldiers were killed, and the numerous arrests of Palestinians and violations of the ceasefire regime around Gaza. The Russian position on a peace settlement in the Middle East was and remains fundamental and consistent. We advocate a comprehensive, fair and stable settlement on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative. We are convinced that the long-term solution to the conflict should be sought through direct negotiations between the parties to the conflict without any preconditions.

The general position of the international community has been stated repeatedly. Based on that consensus, we voted in favour of resolution 2334 (2016). We believe that the resolution provides a consolidated signal that unilateral efforts are unacceptable, whether on the Israeli side or on the Palestinian side. It is also unacceptable to second guess the conclusions that might be reached in the peace negotiations, and it is important to maintain the prospect of a two-State solution. In that context, we note that the concluding statement of the international ministerial conference on the Palestinian-Israeli peace settlement in Paris rightly reproduced the main provisions of the existing international legal basis for conflict settlement and includes an encouragement to the parties to the conflict to restate their commitment to a two-State solution.

At the same time, we remain convinced that today, as never before, the time is ripe for practical measures to be taken to bring the peace process out of its dangerous impasse. With that in mind, we continue to work to renew direct political dialogue between the Palestinians and the Israelis. We restate our readiness to offer Moscow as a forum for that contact. I recall that that meeting was supposed to take place in September last year, and that the Palestinian party was ready for it. Another priority for our work was and remains facilitating intra-Palestinian reconciliation. A high-level meeting of representatives of all of the main Palestinian groups was recently held in Moscow.

We note the key importance of re-establishing the political and geographical unity of Palestine on the basis of the political platforms of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Arab Peace Initiative. If we manage to solve the intra-Palestinian conflict, then we have the preconditions for enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their legal right to an independent and viable State, existing in peace and security with their neighbours.

The effective overcoming of intra-Palestinian discord will also help to ease the situation in Gaza. There, the humanitarian and socioeconomic situations remain very difficult and, as a result, Palestinians are increasingly reliant on the help of the international community. We therefore welcome the work done by United Nations agencies in that area, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The Russian Federation, for its part, has decided to earmark a voluntary contribution of $2 million to the UNRWA budget for 2017-2021.

With regard to settling the crises in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, Russia has unswervingly advocated that there is no alternative to a political and diplomatic process based on inclusive national dialogue. We continue to strive to support the political process for resolving the conflict in Syria, while expanding humanitarian access and the fight against terrorism, as is stipulated in resolution 2254 (2015) and the corresponding decisions of the International Syria Support Group. We welcome the signing of an agreement on 29 December on a ceasefire between the Syrian Government and the main groups of the armed opposition. That took place under the aegis of Russia and Turkey. And naturally, the terrorists of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Al-Nusrah were excluded from that agreement. The ceasefire has been imposed throughout most of the territory.

There are real hopes for the international conference on a Syrian settlement to be held in Astana on 23 January, and active preparation for it is under way. It is expected that it will be attended by representatives of the Syrian Government and of those armed opposition groups that have signed the cessation of hostilities agreement and support a political solution. We are planning the conference as a concrete step in the implementation of resolution 2336 (2016), which approved the December agreements.

In its way, the conference in Kazakhstan represents a bridge to the inclusive Geneva talks that Mr. Staffan de Mistura, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, has scheduled for 8 February. We believe that this resuscitation measure will help to revive the abandoned intra-Syrian dialogue. The format for Astana will involve the participation of United Nations representatives, who could serve as moderators for the contacts between the Syrian sides. In general, the participation of outside invitees, in our view, should be decided according to the tasks identified. Our Kazakh colleagues, as hosts, will have a significant role to play.

We need the involvement of forces wielding influence on the situation on the ground if we are to create conditions conducive to strengthening the ceasefire, and that subject will be at the centre of the talks. It is likely that a number of other important aspects, such as confidence-building measures, improving humanitarian access and the components of the political agenda, will also be discussed. We are currently finalizing the organizational issues. We hope that our international and regional partners will support these efforts. New possibilities are opening up, and and whatever happens, it is vital that we make the most of them.

We hope that the forthcoming meeting in Astana on Syria will enable us to strengthen the cessation of hostilities and give powerful impetus to the process of political settlement under United Nations auspices.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I would like to thank Mr. Mladenov for his comprehensive and very useful briefing.

It is self-evident that peace and stability in the Middle East have broader implications for the maintenance of international peace and security. For Africa, and for the Horn of Africa in particular, developments in the region have significant meaning for our own peace and security, owing to our close proximity. The growing threats of terrorism and violent extremism and the possibility of Da'esh and Al-Qaida establishing links with Al-Shabaab are no longer matters for speculation; they are real. The recent geopolitical shifts in the Middle East and the Red Sea region have also dramatically changed the security dynamics, further complicating the peace and stability of our region. Here I would like to emphasize our vehement condemnation of the terrorist attack in Jerusalem a few days ago. We fully understand the challenge that Israel is dealing with in that regard.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been one of the disputes at the core of the dangerous situation that has essentially defined the Middle East for the past several decades. The situation has been compounded by recent conflicts plaguing other countries in the region. The collapse of State institutions, the growing influence of terrorists and the escalation of sectarian violence threaten to unravel the whole region. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that the fallout from the crisis in the Middle East is likely to have a huge impact on our region, which is partly why we support a peaceful resolution of the conflicts in the Middle East, particularly the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

As a country that is friendly to both Israel and Palestine, Ethiopia is very concerned about the lack of progress in their peace process. Not only have they not made much progress towards resolving the crisis; even more worryingly, there seems to be no real possibility for making progress in the future towards the only viable option for a durable peace — a two-State solution. But we continue to hope that progress is still possible and not all is lost. Such positive developments as the signing two days ago of an agreement renewing the activity of the joint Israeli-Palestinian water committee could give us reason to hope.

Ethiopia's position on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute has always been clear. As much as we support Israel's right to exist in peace and security, we also support the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and Palestine's right to exist as a free and independent State. Given the many problems we have in Africa, and specifically in the Horn of Africa, we should perhaps tread carefully lest we appear to be pontificating on how to achieve peace in the Middle East. But we take the Security Council and the United Nations seriously. We feel that being a member of the Council carries with it an obligation to the Charter of the United Nations and to an institution that emerged from the Second World War — a historical fact that for a variety of reasons can sometimes be overlooked — "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war".

But still, given the political realities, we realize that the Security Council cannot resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict. Only the two parties concerned can do that. But neither can the Council be a mere spectator, which amounts to an abdication of responsibility. It can and must nudge, prod and encourage the parties to make sure that a two-State solution remains viable and that peace is secured, justice is done and the countries' security protected. As the previous Secretary-General said in one of his last speeches to the Council, " The right of the Jewish people to have a State does not negate the right of the Palestinian people to statehood" *(S/PV.7839, p. 2)*. Accordingly, Ethiopia fully supports the goal of two States living side by side in peace and security as the only viable option for a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. We believe that is not only in the best interests of both Israel and Palestine but that it will also significantly advance peace and security in the Middle East.

We all know that many initiatives have been launched to facilitate negotiation between the Israelis and Palestinians with a view to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution. We are meeting just two days after the Paris Middle East Peace Conference, which we welcomed and which is aimed at creating political momentum conducive to new negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians themselves. Unfortunately, peace has so far remained elusive, to the detriment of Israelis and Palestinians as well as to peace and stability in the Middle East. Actions on both sides that run counter to the possibility of achieving a negotiated peace are not only increasing frustration and mistrust but also undermine the very viability of a two-State solution.

At a time when terrorists are expanding their influence in the region and sectarian violence is on the rise, the absence of any meaningful progress will be a recipe for disaster, increasing the radicalization that creates the conditions in which extremists thrive. It is therefore imperative that the two sides resume direct and meaningful negotiations to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution on the basis of mutual trust and a spirit of compromise that ensures Israeli security and Palestinian aspirations to statehood. That is what the situation calls for, and it is also in the best interests of the two parties and of the international community as a whole.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

I would like to begin by welcoming the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) last December. With the two-State solution immediately in jeopardy, it was important for the Security Council to demonstrate a clear commitment to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. The resolution demands that Israel cease settlement activities. It also calls for immediate steps to prevent violence against civilians and for collective efforts to launch negotiations. I would like to stress that the resolution must be taken as a whole. The cessation of settlement activities will not bring about peace on its own, and all other efforts must also contribute to the relaunch of political dialogue. Japan calls upon the relevant parties to show commitment to the resolution.

Little progress has been seen in the Middle East peace process and future prospects are dim. Japan rejects all acts, incitement and glorification of violence. Terrorist attacks, such as the vehicular attack on 8 January, cannot be justified for any reason, and Japan firmly condemns such acts of terrorism. At the same time, the disproportionate use of force by Israel is also a concern. Persistent violence leads people from both sides to lose faith in the two-State solution.

Japan reiterates its firm position that settlement activities are in violation of international law, and Israel must immediately freeze such activities. Japan has on various occasions urged Israel to reconsider its policy. Nevertheless, house demolitions continue in 2017, with over 70 buildings destroyed in the first week of January alone. Those activities physically erode a two-State solution. Unity among Palestinians is also important. Preparations are under way for the first session of the Palestinian National Council in 20 years. Japan hopes that the Council will be inclusive, promote unity and bolster efforts to achieve a two-State solution.

In Gaza, the humanitarian situation is dire. People suffer from a severe lack of electricity, water and places to live. Those hopeless conditions are ruining peace efforts and feeding radicalism, and do not benefit either side. Assistance from the United Nations and other humanitarian institutions is vital and their political space must be maintained. Furthermore, we call for the easing and eventual lifting of the Gaza blockade, while duly taking security concerns into account.

Given those impediments to the peace process, what can we do? Japan is undertaking a three-part approach involving political dialogue, confidence-building and economic assistance to the Palestinians. Japan believes that dialogue is the only way to achieve peace and calls upon both parties to resume direct negotiations. Japan appreciates the various initiatives undertaken by the relevant parties. We welcome the joint communiqué issued at the ministerial-level Middle East Peace Conference hosted by France on 15 January, underscoring international support for a negotiated solution, with two States living side by side in peace and security. State Minister for Foreign Affairs Kentaro Sonoura attended the meeting on behalf of Japan, outlining our efforts to date his his statement. Japan also welcomes the powerful call of United States Secretary of State Kerry on Israel and Palestine to make the difficult choice for peace. The determination shown by the new Secretary-General at the open debate last week (see S/PV.7857) to actively engage in mediation and peace-making is a hopeful sign.

Turning to economic assistance, the Jericho Agro Industrial Park — which Japan has promoted for the past 10 years, together with Palestine, Israel and Jordan — will increasingly contribute to the Palestinian economy and the building of trust in the region. We must also remember the importance of investing in future generations. Last November, Japan initiated a technical assistance programme to revise math and science texts and curricula in Palestine. That augments our previous assistance to those schools and underlines our commitment to future generations.

On confidence-building, Japan promotes regional cooperation in the agricultural sector with Israel, Jordan and Palestine, which enhances mutual trust and the development of agriculture in Palestine. At the grass-roots level, we invited 10 future leaders of Israel and Palestine to Japan last month as part of the programme we have been running for 20 years. The participants spent time together, familiarizing themselves with the history of Japan's post-war reconciliation and development, while exchanging views and developing mutual understanding among themselves. One participant from Palestine commented that it was the first time he had an opportunity to talk to Israelis other than soldiers.

I firmly believe that a peaceful environment enables such an exchange of views and mutual understanding. Recently, I heard from Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, that young people in Gaza have extremely limited opportunity to exit Gaza, much less to interact with Israelis. I recognize the importance of continuing this programme.

In conclusion, Japan reiterates that peace is achieved only through direct negotiations between the parties. I urge both sides to make a decision for peace. Alongside support for political dialogue, Japan will continue to promote confidence-building that enables such dialogue and to offer economic assistance that keeps a two-State solution viable.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East, Mr. Mladenov, for briefing the Council today, and him and his Office for their tireless efforts to keep the Council informed while working with all sides.

Let me begin by reiterating in the strongest possible terms the United States condemnation of the horrific vehicular attack on 8 January by a terrorist in Jerusalem. We extend our deepest condolences to the families of the four Israeli soldiers who were killed, including United States citizen Erez Orbach, and we hope for a full and fast recovery of those injured. The United States and the Security Council both issued statements condemning the attack. There is absolutely no justification for such brutal and senseless attacks. Moreover, we cannot allow attacks like these to deter achieving lasting and durable peace in the Middle East. Resolution 2334 (2016) very clearly addresses the need to prevent acts of terror and to condemn them, observe calm, exercise restraint and refrain from incitement and inflammatory rhetoric.

As we all know, the viability of a two-State solution is increasingly at risk. We have called for both sides to take significant steps on the ground to reverse current negative trends, and to send a clear message that they are prepared to fundamentally change the equation without waiting for the other side to act. We have repeatedly and emphatically stressed to the Palestinians that all incitements to violence must stop and that all acts of terror must be condemned. Our position regarding settlement activity has also been clear. Meanwhile, we have strongly opposed unilateral efforts to deligitimize Israel in international forums.

Unfortunately, trends continue to move in the wrong direction. We must all work together to reverse those trends. As reaffirmed by the participants at the French ministerial-level Middle East Peace Conference over the weekend, the international community stands ready to help the parties realize a two-State solution. The ministerial's communiqué reflected the principles outlined by Secretary Kerry. We ask the parties to restate their commitment to the goal of two States and take urgent steps to reverse trends on the ground that threaten it. Nobody can make decisions on final status issues for Israel or the Palestinians; rather, they must come together to negotiate this themselves in meaningful direct negotiations. It is up to Israel's and Palestinians to make the difficult choices for peace, and if they are ready, we can all help. Our commitment to peace in the Middle East has never wavered and it never will.

Let me move now to Syria. Since 2012, the Council, through numerous resolutions, has called for investigations into chemical weapons use for a nationwide ceasefire and political process to end the war, for sustained humanitarian assistance to all Syrians in need and for steps to be taken to halt the unceasing hell the Syrian people have been living through since the conflict started. Yet here we are in 2017, just a month after the United Nations alerted the world to credible and continuing reports of terrible atrocities in Syria, including summary executions, intense bombardment of areas still populated with civilians and dire humanitarian conditions. Given the grave situations Syrians continue to find themselves in, we support all genuine efforts to de-escalate the violence in Syria and pave the way for renewed intra-Syria talks.

To that end, we support recent Russian and Turkish efforts to bring about a true ceasefire that is respected by all parties. We expect those efforts to lead to the resumption of United Nations-led talks between the regime and the opposition, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), as well as the Geneva principles of 30 June 2012. As we have long said, the parameters for those talks must include a viable nationwide ceasefire, the delivery of humanitarian assistance for all who need it and a Syrian-owned and -led political process that can bring about a more representative, peaceful and united Syria.

While the current ceasefire has somewhat reduced violence, attacks continue and thousands of Syrians remain under siege. For months, no United Nations assistance has been delivered to those trapped by the regime, Iran and Hizbullah in towns outside Damascus, despite the presence of United Nations warehouses just a few kilometres away. I remind the Council that those cynical siege tactics and attacks on civilians are a real threat to international peace and security, since they drive the radical extremism that the perpetrators claim they are trying to fight. We cannot remain silent while those atrocities serve as a recruitment tool for terrorists.

In Lebanon, we welcome the formation of a cabinet and encourage the new Lebanese Government and President Michel Aoun to seize this opportunity to respond to the needs of the Lebanese people and to address the pressing security, economic and humanitarian challenges facing the country. The United States reaffirms its strong commitment to Lebanon's security, stability and sovereignty, and we look to all parties in Lebanon to uphold its international obligations, including those contained in resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). We will continue to support Lebanon's State institutions, including the Lebanese Armed Forces and internal security forces, which defend Lebanon's borders and contain violent spillover effects form the Syrian conflict.

Finally, turning to Iraq, in Mosul, the Iraqi security forces — supported by the international counter-Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant coalition — are making strides against Da'esh, having liberated almost half of the city, with the rest soon to follow. The humanitarian situation, however, remains dire for the millions of internally displaced and other civilians impacted by the conflict. The United States has partnered with the Iraqis, the United Nations and others to fund and coordinate the delivery of life-saving assistance. We also note the Government of Iraq's close attention to preventing and minimizing civilian harm in the course of ongoing combat operations. Yet, the eventual defeat of Da'esh will not mark the finish line. Post liberation, Iraqis from all sects, ethnicities and creeds will need to commit to the challenging, often frustrating and compromise-driven process of political reconciliation. Meaningful reconciliation will be essential if Iraq is to avoid a future resurgence of extremism and violence.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China commends the holding of this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, under the Swedish presidency. I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Mladenov, for his briefing to the Council. The Palestinian question is at the crux of the Middle East issue. It is a fundamental question for the region. Safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of the Palestinian people is the common responsibility of the international community.

Presently, the conflagration between Palestine and Israel is become increasingly intense, with frequent outbreaks of violence and peace talks are at an impasse. The humanitarian situation is dire. The international community should take effective actions to push for a solution to the question in order to realize the two-State solution, as soon as possible.

First of all, we must stay committed to the correct path of the independent statehood of Palestine, with Palestine and Israel coexisting in peace. The establishment of a fully sovereign State of Palestine, on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people and it is also the key to the Palestinian question. The parties should be firm in advancing the peace process on the basis of the land for peace principle, the two-State solution, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Secondly, both Israel and Palestine should take the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) as an opportunity to resume the peace talks as soon as possible. A few weeks ago, the Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016) on Israeli settlements. Both Israel and Palestine should effectively implement that resolution, remain calm, practice restraint and gradually rebuild mutual trust in order to return to the right path of peace negotiations. Israel should cease the construction of settlements and the demolition of Palestinian homes, in order to create adequate conditions for the resumption of peace talks. The legitimate security concerns of countries of the region must be respected. Both Israel and Palestine have the responsibility to ensure that United Nations agencies can continue regularly with their mandates, without any interference.

Thirdly, there must be broader engagement on the part of the international community. China welcomes the successful convening in Paris of the international conference on the question of Palestine. We hope it marks a new start to intensified diplomatic efforts. China supports all efforts that are conducive to easing the situation between Israel and Palestine and to achieving the two-State solution. We support relevant actors in making contributions from different angles to build new momentum for peace talks, in order to set up a more effective mechanism for peace in the Middle East, positively address the legitimate concerns of Palestine and Arab States and play a more positive role in pushing for an end to the conflict and the resumption of peace talks.

Fourthly, we should continue to promote economic reconstruction in Palestine. China urges Israel to cooperate with international assistance efforts and completely lift the blockade against the Gaza Strip. The parties should respond actively to the United Nations Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People and engage in economic cooperation in order to improve Palestine's humanitarian situation and living conditions. China will continue to provide assistance to Palestine and stands ready to work within the framework of the One Belt, One Road initiative to help Palestine achieve socioeconomic development as soon as possible.

China is a firm supporter of the just cause of the Palestinian people. China is also an active mediator for peace between Palestine and Israel. We stand ready along with the international community to further our efforts to push for an early solution to the Palestinian question, a solution that is complete and just, in order to realize peace and stability in the Middle East.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I think you, Sir, for convening today's open debate. I also appreciate the briefing by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, which was very useful.

The Middle East peace process remains at the core of any efforts aimed at restoring regional stability. Ukraine consistently supports the Middle East peace process and the principle of a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine coexisting in peace and security. In this regard, we are outraged by the latest wave of attacks and widespread violence. Ukraine strongly condemns the terrorist attack in East Jerusalem on 8 January, which is another stark reminder of how dangerous the situation has become.

Preserving the current status quo and doing nothing will only lead to further deterioration of the volatile security environment for both Israelis and Palestinians. I want to make it crystal clear that absolutely no terrorist act can be justified, and we strongly condemn any attempts to glorify such acts. Perpetrators must be brought to justice, as should instigators and sponsors of terrorism. At the same time, both sides must demonstrate genuine restraint and refrain from the use of force that could only stir up violence and lead to increased casualties. This is a very bad time in the region to do things that can play into extremists hands.

Diplomatic efforts must be redoubled to contain and de-escalate the latest wave of violence and unlock Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Ukraine welcomes any international effort aimed at bringing new dynamics to the Middle East settlement process or at finding opportunities for the resumption of negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. We believe that the French initiative and the recently-concluded international conference in Paris remain an important element in the international efforts to give peace a chance.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that any international effort aimed at encouraging the negotiation process cannot succeed without direct dialogue between the parties to the conflict, the Israeli and Palestinian sides, and a genuine adherence to their commitments. Ukraine reiterates its position that Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement lies within the framework of the unconditional fulfilment by the parties of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, including land for peace, the road map, the agreements previously reached by the parties and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

The Syrian conflict is probably the greatest regional challenge — and one of the largest global challenges — the world is facing as we enter the year 2017. We look forward with hope towards the resumption of the intra-Syrian political talks scheduled to take place next month in Geneva. However, there are still plenty of reasons to remain sceptical about the prospects for these talks. The underlying cause for this scepticism is the fact that Damascus is moving with all deliberate speed to impose a military solution in Syria, ignoring its commitments to the political track and implementing a kneel-or-die type of strategy.

By adopting resolution 2336 (2016), the Security Council gave a generous credit of trust to the Russian Federation and its ability to deliver results after the announcement of the nationwide ceasefire in Syria. However, after nearly three weeks, we do not see substantial changes in the country, neither on the battlefield nor in the political domain. I believe that the Syrian government forces' offensive in Wadi Barada and eastern Ghouta is the main impediment to the resumption of talks. To make the ceasefire work, a necessary level of confidence and trust, which is clearly missing now after so many years of conflict in Syria, should be built up among the parties. The establishment of a credible multiparty monitoring mechanism with the participation of the United Nations is a key requirement for any viable ceasefire to work.

Unfortunately, so far, the monitoring mechanism embedded in the 29 December ceasefire agreements exists only on paper. We believe that only full implementation of and adherence to the letter and spirit of the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015) can lead to the settlement of the conflict in Syria. That is why the only way out of the current impasse is a results-oriented discussion on the establishment of a credible, inclusive nonsectarian governance-transition body, followed by the adoption of a new Constitution and the holding of elections.

Ukraine is convinced of the urgent need to put an end to the violence in Yemen. The continued lack of progress in the intra-Yemeni political process is deeply troubling. However, the absence of a final agreement so far should not be interpreted by the parties as a pretext for escalating the fighting. The nationwide ceasefire must be re-established and observed, paving the way for a new round of talks. We therefore call on the parties to resume direct talks without preconditions and conduct these negotiations in the most flexible and constructive manner, which would enable them to swiftly reach a final and comprehensive agreement.

Without meaningful dialogue the results may be disastrous. The only parties that would benefit from this would be the terrorist groups that are increasingly active in Yemen. It is increasingly worrisome to see Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula continuing to demonstrate a sustained ability to expand its base of support in Yemen and exploit deepening division lines in the war-torn Yemeni society.

The rapidly evolving threat of violent extremism surpasses the boundaries of any region. It benefits from existing conflicts and continues to destabilize countries across the Middle East. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), despite some serious military setbacks, remains a viable threat to regional and global security.

Pending the ultimate inevitable conventional military defeat of ISIL, there is an urgent need to create a day-after strategy with the regional actors playing a leading role in preventing a resurgence of its clones. Without a clear way out of the multiple crises that are tearing apart the Middle East, particularly those in Syria, Yemen and Iraq, it will be impossible to contain the growing threat of violent extremism and the global spread of terrorist groups.

Mr. Sadykov (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing on the escalating situation in the Middle East and especially for his efforts to seek a peaceful solution to the several issues in the region.

With respect to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, we are seriously concerned by the trends of a complicated humanitarian situation, economic backwardness, the ongoing construction of settlements and the growing acts of violence — all of which are unacceptable. The peaceful coexistence of two States, which must start with the early resumption of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, especially in the bilateral format and via intensified efforts in the framework of the Middle East Quartet and all other diplomatic initiatives, is the only viable option.

The rights to life and to security are among humankind's major postulates. Let us therefore grant the right to life to an independent Palestinian State and the right to security to the State of Israel. We call on both sides to demonstrate wisdom, responsibility and the political will needed to reach a historic peace agreement that would meet the legitimate aspirations of both their peoples.

As the Chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2010 and of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 2011, and having established the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, Kazakhstan is convinced through first-hand experience that long-term stability and sustainable peace can be achieved only by understanding the strong connection between peace, security and development. We would therefore like to call for restoring mutual trust by increasing investments in sustainable development and economic growth as confidence-building measures between the parties.

Kazakhstan commends France for organizing, on 15 January in Paris, the international Peace Conference on the Middle East and considers it a contribution to international efforts to find a viable road map for the two sides to work together towards a mutually agreeable solution.

The devastating situation in Syria concerns Kazakhstan, as it does the rest of the world. The catastrophe has spread beyond the region, with far-reaching, perilous implications. Kazakhstan continues to support the measures taken by the United Nations, the League of Arab States, the United States, the Russian Federation, Turkey and the international community to bring the Syrian Government and opposition forces together for dialogue and reconciliation. We particularly commend the unceasing efforts of Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria Staffan de Mistura and appreciate the solidarity and unity exerted by the members of the Council in adopting unanimously resolution 2336 (2016), presented by the Russian Federation and Turkey, to end the violence in Syria and jump-start a renewed political process. The upcoming meeting in Astana, as the platform provided by my country's leadership, is intended to be an important part of the Syrian-led political process and will be a significant step ahead of the resumption of negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva next month. Preparations for the Astana meeting are well under way.

As a country that prioritized food, water and energy security as the foundations for peace, Kazakhstan calls upon all parties to stop civilian deaths and suffering and provide access to those basic necessities, along with health services. Of special importance is to allow the much-needed delivery of humanitarian aid in the besieged areas. To that end, we commend the neighbouring States of Syria, such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, which opened their borders to accommodate refuges and are struggling hard to cope with one of the largest refugee exoduses in recent history.

Iraq deserves special attention because of the grave humanitarian situation in the northern part of the country, namely, in Mosul. We call for safe corridors and full mobilization of emergency assistance, life-support services and humanitarian assitance in order to relieve the suffering of the population.

Counter-terrorism is central to any discussion on the Middle East, as terrorism today, in all its forms and manifestations, constitutes one of the most serious threats to regional and global peace and security, most of all in the Middle East region, because of the destructive activities of well-known violent extremist organizations. In that regard, we would like to remind the Council of Kazakhstan's proposed initiative to develop a code of conduct for anti-terrorist operations, as well as establishing a United Nations-led worldwide coalition/network for the implementation of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Finally, we reiterate our robust commitment to ensure peace in the Middle East, based on building a secure, just and prosperous world for all.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I thank Nickolay for his briefing just now, which made clear that we are beginning a difficult year for the Middle East.

Fifty years since the Six Day War and almost six years since the start of fighting in Syria, peace for many in the region is but a distant memory. Years of violence are now, sadly, the norm. We saw that last week on the streets of Jerusalem. Let me take this opportunity to condemn that horrific terrorist attack and to offer my sincere condolences to the four victims and their families. There simply can be no justification for this kind of terrorism. The United Kingdom urges the authorities to take appropriate actions against those who commit such crimes. And we call upon Hamas and other terrorist groups permanently to end their violence and rocket fire against Israel.

At the root of this violence lies a seemingly unending cycle of poisonous rhetoric and incitement. The British Government strongly condemns the use of racist, anti-Semitic and hateful language. We deplore incitement, wherever it comes from. As the Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex) made clear, this spiral of violence and incitement is only eroding the prospects of a two-State solution. It is critical that the Palestinian leadership implement the recommendations of the report and continue their efforts to tackle terror and incitement, strengthen institutions and develop a sustainable economy.

It was because of the United Kingdom's long-running support for the two-State solution and our commitment to Israel as the Jewish homeland that we voted in favour of resolution 2234 (2016) last month. It has long been our position that Israeli settlement activity is illegal and undermines the viability of two States for two peoples. But we should also recognize that the resolution calls upon all parties to exert efforts to launch credible negotiations on all final-status issues and urged the intensification and acceleration of international and regional efforts to support a comprehensive peace. We recognize that, utlimately, an agreement can be achieved only by direct negotiations between the parties. But international action has an important role to play in supporting those bilateral efforts and in helping bring about peace — and it is long overdue.

Turning briefly now to Syria, we begin 2017 much as we did 2016, with some cautious and fragile optimism. But although 2016 began with promise — the International Syria Support Group, resolution 2254 (2015) and the London Conference — the year that followed saw some of the worst violence since the start of the conflict. We owe it to the people of Aleppo, and so many others, to ensure that in 2017 we seen the end of atrocities by the Syrian regime. That means that this year must be the year that we see a full, nationwide cessation of hostilities, one monitored by the United Nations and that leads to a return to genuine and inclusive political negotiations led by the United Nations. We will support all efforts that bring about that reality. For that reason, we welcome the adoption of resolution 2336 (2016) last year. It is time for that resolution, and all those before it, to be fully enacted.

The ceasefire agreed by Russia, Turkey and Iran, which came into force on 29 December, is still very fragile. Reports of violations are commonplace. We must continue to monitor developments in the coming days and weeks and ensure that all those directly involved in violations and those with influence adhere to the ceasefire.

We are especially concerned by the situation in the Wadi Barada area of Damascus. Civilians there are facing intense bombardment from pro-regime forces. More than 5 million people across Damascus also remain without access to the central water supply. And there are still more than 700,000 people in besieged areas in Syria, the vast majority besieged by the regime, whose activity has been abetted by external actors.

We can therefore be under no illusions. The task to bring peace to Syria remains painfully incomplete. The frameworks for dialogue are there, but they cannot exist on paper alone. And those who have perpetrated terrible crimes in Syria continue to escape justice. As we work together to find peace this year, we must pursue accountability in tandem. To that end, the

United Kingdom and France will be putting forward a draft resolution to ensure that those members of the regime who were involved in the abhorrent use of chemical weapons will face the consequences. We urge all members to support that vital initiative when it comes before the Security Council.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): There has been a conviction that conflicts and events in the Middle East would undermine attention on the question of Palestine and that efforts to sustain the status quo would lead to tensions in the occupied Palestinian territories, thereby affecting stability in the region.

That conviction, however, is false. That is why international efforts, including those of Egypt, the United States and France, have been made to revive negotiations between the two parties, proving that the question of Palestine is still alive and awaiting solution, especially now as the Middle East is witnessing unprecedented political developments, recurrent crises, tremendous challenges and widespread chaos that undermine the very notion of statehood.

The peace process has not seen such prevarication since the adoption of the Oslo Accords. Each time, the international community has worked hard to push the two parties towards serious negotiations, regardless of setbacks, because all were aware of the danger of stalling or delaying the process. Egypt has warned against such delays, and I know that everyone agrees with me that the situation in the Middle East cannot afford any escalation of the situation of Palestine. Frustration and despair are fuels that will stoke violence and extremism and play into the hands of extremist groups seeking to influence and lure our young people to the brink of chaos that will destroy their future and their lives.

Given the specific options available to Egypt in this situation, including its clear connections and channels of communication with the two parties and the experience we have accumulated over the years in our efforts to bring them to the negotiating table, as well as our historic support for the rights of the Palestinians and for peace with Israel, Egypt will spare no effort to achieve a comprehensive and just peace in the region based on the two-State solution, put an end to the conflict in cooperation with likeminded countries, ease tensions, calm relations between the two parties as a prelude to direct negotiations, and build trust and the necessary foundations for future negotiations. Such negotiations would address all final status issues and lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

I do not believe that I am exaggerating in saying that a resolution of the Palestinian question would help to enhance cooperation among the countries of the region in seeking solutions to other crises there. Thus, in 2002 the Arab world launched a comprehensive vision for achieving that goal, namely, the Arab Peace Initiative. All we need do is translate the Initiative into concrete, incremental steps. Our recent efforts, within the Council and beyond, are part and parcel of the peace process that we have been developing for more than 50 years. We will pursue that path even though we are fully aware of the difficulties ahead in reaching a settlement to a very complex and thorny conflict — perhaps the most complicated in our history.

Egypt is aware of the heavy responsibility it must bear in that regard, and will spare no effort in assuming it, fully committed as we are to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, our belief in the legimate rights of the Palestinian people and the legitimate norms of international law, and our aspirations to achieve prosperity and peace. Egypt will redouble its efforts to ensure success in the peace negotiations, and calls on all parties to assist to that end and help prevent any setback that might perpetuate the occupation. I call on the two parties to demonstrate the courage to take the difficult decisions necessary to achieving peace for the region and its peoples.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to thank your presidency, Sir, for its leadership at the head of the Council and for having convened this meeting.

I also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing today. We believe that meetings such as today's contribute towards settling a just, comprehensive and long-lasting conflict that has peristed without resolution for decades.

Bolivia condemns terrorism and violence, regardless of the perpetrators or their motives. All our efforts will be aimed ultimately at achieving peace for the Palestinian and the Israeli peoples. Bolivia participated in the Middle East Peace Conference to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, held on 15 January in Paris, and thanks France, and in particular

President Hollande, for their efforts in that regard. The Conference confirmed yet again that the only solution acceptable to the international community is the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine.

Like my colleague, the Permanent Representative of Uruguay, I recall that General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947 — I repeat, 29 November 1947 — referred to the future Government of Palestine. Seventy years have gone by since the adoption of that resolution and fifty since Israel first occupied Palestinian territory. A number of conventional wars have been fought and numerous acts of aggression committed, including the despicable attack in Gaza perpetrated by Israeli military forces in 2014.

Dozens of resolutions on this tragic situation have been adopted by the Organization. The the committees of the General Assembly and the Security Council have spoken clearly of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Bolivia supported the adoption of General Assembly resolution 67/19, recognizing Palestine as a non-member observer State of the Organization and allowing the flag of Palestine to be raised outside the Hall in permanent recognition of the silence and failure of the Organization.

We welcome the recent adoption of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), reaffirming the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and condemning all steps taken to change the demographic composition, nature and status of Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. We have also condemned, inter alia, the construction and expansion of settlements, the transfer of settlers, the confiscation of land, the demolition of housing and the displacement of Palestinian civilians, in violation of international humanitarian law and relevant resolutions of the Council.

I should like to share an experience I had a few years ago, working here at Headquarters. I recall that in one committee, as we adopted a draft resolution recognizing the rights of the Palestinian people, an Israeli representative took the floor to say, more or less, that we could adopt all the resolutions we wanted to adopt because they would in any event do nothing but collect dust here in the archives. I was struck by the disregard for the decisions that we have taken. But I was struck even more by the situation on the ground, as the widespread and systematic violation of the decisions taken by the organs of the United Nations reflects the failure of the international community over the past 50 years. There are two parties to the conflict, but we must never forget that those two parties, which are not on equal footing, do not view the conflict in the same way.

Neither the Council nor the Organization should ever forget that one of the parties is the occupying Power. The Organization should never forget that one of the parties uses, and has used, force to occupy the territory of the other party. Let us not forget that one of the parties has built a wall, which, according to the 2004 advisory opinion (see A/ES-10/273) of the International Court of Justice, represents a breach of international law. Let us not forget that one of the parties, pursuant to resolution 2334 (2016) and others, has built illegal settlements on the territory of the other. Let us not forget that one of the parties has forcibly displaced civilians, built settlements, confiscated land, demolished homes and imposed a blockade on Gaza, which has had terrible humanitarian consequences. One of the parties has taken punitive action against those countries that voted in favour of resolution 2334 (2016) or have expressed agreement with its provisions. One of the parties dishonours its international obligations and systematically violates the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. It does so because, as long as they are not implemented, as the representative of Israel has stated, those resolutions and the Charter of the United Nations will simply gather dust.

We face a choice. Will the Charter of the United Nations prevail, or will the occupation continue? Will the Charter prevail, or will colonialism continue? Will the Charter prevail, or will the illegal activities continue? Will the Charter prevail, or will the acquisition of territory by force continue? That is why the involvement of the international community is so crucial, as it can enable the victims of the occupation to experience conditions that are less unequal, as the international community tries to resolve the protracted conflict.

We draw attention to the unusual and tragic situation of Palestinian refugees and the dire situation in Gaza, where access to basic services such as water, electricity and other sources of energy is unpredictable. In the same vein, with regard to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the international community must not spread the vicious lie that the Sustainable Development

Goals can be achieved in a territory under foreign occupation. It will not be possible for the Palestinian people to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda if they remain under Israeli occupation. We commend the efforts undertaken by France, the Quartet, the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. As the President of Bolivia, Evo Morales Ayma, stated, we welcome Pope Francis' assertion that lasting peace could be achieved in the Middle East through dialogue.

Secretary-General António Guterres has injected new energy and hope into the work of the Organization. He has declared that 2017 will be the year for peace. We hope that the work of the Council will be carried out with that goal in mind. If we wish to meet the challenge set out by the Secretary-General himself and the Charter of the United Nations on this very sensitive issue, and in order to ensure that the Charter does not continue to gather dust for decades, it is crucial that we put an end once and for all to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, which began in 1967, and ensure the right of the Palestinian people to independence and a sovereign, contiguous and stable Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

To that end, we believe, with regard to the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2334 (2016), adopted in December 2016, that three priorities exist for the path that leads to the success or failure of the Council and of the international community. The three priorities are implementation, implementation and implementation.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Sweden.

First, I would like to thank Special Coordinator Mr. Mladenov for his tireless work and that of the entire United Nations staff on the ground.

The international community is committed to a two-State solution with an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, and with Jerusalem as the future capital of both States. However, the two-State solution is becoming more distant each day. The constant deterioration in the situation on the ground, with continued settlement expansion, demolitions and violence, is destroying the hopes for peace. We must avoid a move towards a one-State reality and perpetual occupation.

Sweden's long-standing engagement on the Middle East peace process is based on international law, including human rights law and international humanitarian law. It was our support for the two-State solution and our desire to make the parties less unequal that led us to recognize the State of Palestine in 2014.

The international community has an important role to play in moving from words to action by helping to break the current deadlock and by finally ending the occupation that started 50 years ago. We welcome the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), which is a milestone towards resumed efforts to save the two-State solution. We must now encourage the parties to swiftly implement its provisions, as has been stated by everyone in the Chamber today. More than 70 countries met in Paris last Sunday in order to save and promote the two-State solution. We commend France for its initiative — a much-needed recommitment to the peace process. We welcome the adoption of the joint statement of the Paris Middle East Conference, especially the recommendation to refrain from unilateral steps that prejudge the outcome of negotiations on final status issues, including the future status of Jerusalem, and the stated readiness of the interested parties to meet again before the end of the year to review progress.

As part of the French initiative, Sweden convened a working group on civil society, which heard the voices of 150 civil-society organizations in Israel and Palestine. We thank all the countries and international organizations that have supported those efforts, and we welcome the fact that other countries now want to join. In those consultations, it was made clear that many in the post-Oslo generation, on both sides, had lost hope that the two-State solution is attainable. We need to engage civil society to revive a public debate on the prospects for peace and the two-State solution. We need to show young women and men that there is an alternative to the current violence, the depressing status quo and the continuously negative developments on the ground. Sweden will therefore host a civil-society forum this spring.

We fully support the efforts of the United Nations, the Quartet and the League of Arab States. The United Nations and its presence, through various United Nations bodies on the ground, play an important role in supporting the Palestinian people. We support a reinvigorated Quartet that moves forward to seek to facilitate the swift implementation of the recommendations contained in its report of 7 July 2016

(S/2016/595, annex). We highlight the importance of implementing the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. Finally, I would like to recognize the outgoing United States Administration for its efforts, including Secretary Kerry's remarks on 28 December. We look forward to continued United States engagement in support of the two-State solution.

On Lebanon, Sweden welcomes the election of Michel Aoun as President on 31 October 2016 and the formation of a Government of national accord, led by Prime Minister Saad Hariri, in December. We hope that these positive developments will now pave the way for parliamentary elections. We commend Lebanon for hosting more than 1.1 million Syrian refugees and call for the implementation of the shared commitments on refugees made at the London Conference on 4 February 2016. We support United Nations-led efforts on the ground.

Finally, the situation in Syria is the crisis of our time, with a devastating toll in human suffering. We welcome the unity in the Council in December that led to the adoption of resolution 2336 (2016).

Despite the reduced levels of violence resulting from the ceasefire, humanitarian access remains dismal. All parties to the conflict, not least the Syrian Government, must ensure full, timely, safe and unhindered access for humanitarian workers countrywide.

Sweden looks forward to a resumption of the United Nations-led intra-Syrian talks in Geneva on 8 February, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), and hopes that the Astana meeting can help create the right conditions for this. Syrian women must be fully involved in the process. We must also work together to ensure accountability for the atrocities committed during the conflict, some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. The blinking lamp on the microphone signals that the time is up; it is not an encouragement to keep talking. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I wish also to inform the Council that we will be carrying on this open debate right through the lunch hour, as we have a large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon): As the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza enters its fiftieth year, the words of the late Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish resound more than ever:

> "The Palestinians are the only nation in the world that feels with certainty that today is better than what the days ahead will hold. Tomorrow always heralds a worse situation".

For almost half a century now the Palestinians have had that certainty ingrained in their minds. I need hardly remind the Council that for the Palestinians the situation on the ground has continued to deteriorate for five decades, with daily violations of their basic rights, including countless killings, arbitrary arrests and detention, confiscation of their private property, demolition of their homes and forcible displacement. And as the days, weeks, months and years pass, more Israeli settlements are built on occupied Palestinian territory, thus rendering the prospects for a just, comprehensive and durable peace, based on the principle of a two-State solution, less and less attainable.

Amid this grim reality, the latest breakthrough achieved with the adoption of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) must be welcomed.

Regrettably, and in reaction to the adoption of this resolution, we have also witnessed Israeli inflammatory rhetoric and hatred towards the United Nations and the international community, denouncing a so-called bias and a disproportionate number of resolutions against Israel.

However, the only disproportionate matter here is the number of years the Palestinian people have been waiting for the implementation, yet to come, of dozens of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions recognizing their legitimate aspirations of ending the occupation and their right to live, like all other peoples on the planet, in an independent and viable State of their own.

There is no bias whatsoever when United Nations resolutions recall, year after year, Israel's lack of compliance with its obligations under the Charter and international law. As a matter of fact, resolution 2334 (2016) mainly reaffirms — and let me stress the word "reaffirms" — what has emerged for many years as a consensus within the international community: that Israeli settlements have no legal basis and constitute a major impediment to the two-State solution.

If there is any bias in the matter, it would then be that no concrete measures have yet been taken to compel Israel to abide by its obligations under Security Council resolutions, the Charter and international law.

I would also like to commend the Government of France — and here I wish to say, thank you, France — for all the efforts it has deployed to ensure the convening of the Middle East Peace Conference in Paris on 15 January and to welcome its outcome in the form of a joint declaration that reaffirmed the commitment of all the participants to a negotiated political solution based on two States, and

> "underscored the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 as a comprehensive framework for the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict".

Let me now turn to Syria.

Almost six years into the conflict, the time has come to end this crisis, which has claimed hundreds of thousands of innocent victims, destroyed livelihoods and laid waste to much of the people's property and to the country's infrastructure. Here we welcome the efforts undertaken by Russia and Turkey to facilitate the establishment of a ceasefire in Syria, and the resumption of the political process through the meeting that will be held in Astana later this month. We would also like to acknowledge the efforts by the Government of Kazakhstan to organize and host this very important meeting, and we look forward to the resumption of negotiations in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations.

Finally, as for Lebanon, despite the extremely volatile situation in the Middle East, the resumption of the normal functioning of State institutions is a clear demonstration yet again of the resilience of my country and the attachment of its citizens to their democratic traditions. At the core of the ministerial declaration of the Government of Lebanon, based on the acceptance speech of the newly elected President of the Republic, is the safeguarding of the sovereignty of Lebanon and its stability. In this regard, my Government reaffirmed its firm commitment to the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), which helped to put an end to the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon.

During this war, Israel bombarded the Jiyyeh power plant, which resulted in an unprecedented oil spill on Lebanese shores, with a substantial environmental impact. And for 10 consecutive years, the General Assembly has been adopting, by an overwhelming majority of States from all regional and cross-regional groups, a resolution requesting Israel to pay prompt and adequate compensation to Lebanon for the damage caused by the oil spill, deemed to be in the amount of $856 million, as per the relevant report of the Secretary-General.

Allow me to conclude by reiterating today what I said before the Council in July 2016: it is almost impossible to maintain peace and security if States are not held responsible for their internationally wrongful acts. Hence it is our firm belief that it is now the responsibility of the Council, as the main organ entrusted under the United Nations Charter with the maintenance of peace and security, to act without delay to ensure that Israel compensates Lebanon for the damage related to the oil spill it has caused.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Pedersen (Norway): There is a strong international consensus on how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be solved. Let me mention three main points.

First, a negotiated two-State solution with two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, is the only way to achieve a durable peace.

Secondly, the parties should restate their commitments to the two-State solution and take urgent steps in order to reverse current negative trends on the ground, including settlement activities and continued acts of violence.

Thirdly, the outstanding issues between the parties can be resolved only through direct negotiations.

Norway is actively engaged as the Chair of the so-called Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC) in supporting the parties to make further progress on strengthening the Palestinian institutions and sustaining the Palestinian economy. The donors need to realize that the Palestinian Authority will not be able to close the current financing gap by itself, partly due to a significant drop in budget support. The donors should reconsider their budget support commitments and disburse their pledges made at the Cairo conference in 2014.

The AHLC has never been an alternative, of course, to any peace agreement, but a necessary condition for it. As a State-building project, it has underpinned the two-State solution. It is the only existing international mechanism whereby both parties meet regularly and engage in a serious dialogue to resolve outstanding economic issues. Most important, with the assistance of the AHLC, the parties have made progress and delivered concrete results. Let me mention just two examples.

First, an agreement was reached on transferring the authority of the electricity sector to the Palestinian Authority last fall. Secondly, an agreement was reached last Sunday to renew the activity of the Joint Water Committee to improve water infrastructure and supplies to the Palestinian people. Both of those agreements are significant steps in transferring authority to the Palestinian Authority as outlined in the Oslo Accords. Palestinian State-building must continue. It is critical to the viability of the two-State solution. It is also critical for delivering basic public services, such as water and energy, to the Palestinian people.

With regard to Syria, all sides should grasp 2017 as an opportunity to find a way out of the destructive cycle of escalation and counter-escalation. The conflict has already resulted in an economic loss of $275 billion, and the estimated cost needed to reconstruct Syria is a daunting $180 to $200 billion. The reconstruction of Syria is intricately linked to the ceasefire and political negotiations. We are therefore pleased that the ceasefire is holding, thereby ensuring somewhat improved humanitarian access. But the numerous alleged violations are of great concern. We hope that the Astana meeting will focus on securing a lasting ceasefire to further reduce violence. The ceasefire is also important for confidence-building. It provides an important framework in which to resume the United Nations-led negotiations in Geneva on 8 February. Resolutions 2254 (2015), 2268 (2016) and 2336 (2016) must be fully implemented. It is time to get back to work and agree on a peaceful future for Syria.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to convey my appreciation to you, Sir, and the Swedish presidency, and to express my thanks to Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

My delegation welcomed the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), which is a step in the right direction, namely, the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination. The resolution represents the consensus and political will of the international community to object to and oppose the policies and practices of the Israeli regime against the Palestinians. While the regime, encouraged by impunity, has always flouted international law, including United Nations resolutions, the Security Council should uphold its responsibility as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations by adopting necessary measures to implement its recent resolution and end the criminal policies that the regime has pursued thus far.

The rapid increase in illegal settlements in Palestinian territory, which constitute not only a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention but also war crimes, as defined by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, demonstrated long ago that the Israeli regime has never had any interest in peace with the Palestinians and that its participation in the peace process has been just a cover to hide its policy of aggression and expansion. In the past few years, it has increasingly put aside that cover and utterly negated the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Under the current circumstances, as it was always the case in the past, the situation in Palestine requires urgent international attention and action. The illegal and brutal occupation continues unabated, causing much suffering to the Palestinian people, and is dangerously inflaming tensions in the already volatile situation faced by the region. The Israeli regime continues to breach international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law and, by doing so, inflicts widespread human suffering on civilians and deliberately destabilizes the situation, with far-reaching and serious consequences for peace and security in and beyond the Middle East.

At the same time, the criminal policies and practices, including the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip, are causing massive deprivation, hopelessness and a grave humanitarian crisis. The destructive impact of such violations is immense, as reflected in the rising tensions and the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions among the Palestinian civilian population, which has been living under half a century of Israeli occupation.

Other crises in our region, such as those in Libya, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, all share the common element of being stoked by invasion, illegal foreign intervention, terror, extremism and violence. Those problems have persisted and deepened because the international community has failed to do its part in dealing with the root causes.

Finally, Lebanon continues to suffer from the successive Israeli violations of its borders and incursions into its territory, followed by subsequent years of occupation and aggression. Unfortunately, the Israeli regime continues to violate Lebanese airspace and territory. Such activities are a blatant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and the relevant international resolutions.

The occupation of the Syrian Golan continues to demonstrate another aspect of Israeli aggressiveness. Their attempts to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, which have intensified after the outbreak of Syrian crisis, constitute another grave breach of international law. In that case, as well, Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and other relevant resolutions have been flouted by the Israeli regime, while the Security Council has failed to take any action.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Djani.

Mr. Djani: On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I wish to begin by congratulating Sweden on its election to the Security Council and on its presidency, and by congratulating the other newly elected members, Bolivia, Ethiopia, Italy and Kazakhstan. We express our appreciation, as well, for the outgoing Council members — among whom there are members of our own Committee — and recognize their efforts during their mandates — Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain and Venezuela. Allow me also to congratulate His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres on assuming his duties at the helm of the United Nations. The Committee looks forward to working closely with the new Secretary-General and the wider United Nations family towards resolving the question of Palestine, which has been on the agendas of the Security Council and General Assembly for far too long. While the necessary components for the settlement of this long-standing issue are well known to all, the Secretary-General's good offices, vigour and experience will be pivotal in making the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace a reality.

Despite efforts to break the political stalemate, the year 2016 saw limited achievements on the part of the international community in realizing enduring peace and a negotiated two-State solution on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. In the meantime, the two-State solution continues to be severely threatened by unrelenting developments on the ground, including the decade-long blockade of Gaza, which amounts to collective punishment, and the construction and expansion of settlements, the transfer of Israeli settlers, the confiscation of land, the demolition of home and the displacement of Palestinian civilians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which amount to altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967. All are in violation of international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions. All of those actions are in violation of international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions and, along with other ongoing provocations and incitement, they raise tensions and fuel resentment and violence. Similarly, preventing Palestinian development in Area C of the occupied West Bank and taking Palestinian land for Israeli settlement activities only increase a sense of frustration and hopelessness and call into question Israel's commitment to the two-State solution.

Yet there were reasons for hope last year and in the first weeks of the new year, including action by the Council and the French initiative, which the Committee supported. On 23 December, by resolution 2334 (2016), co-sponsored by three members of the Committee and New Zealand and supported by another 10 members of the Council, including two Committee members/observers, namely, Egypt and Ukraine, for a total of 14 in favour and one abstention, the Council demonstrated its much-needed leadership at this stage. The Council unequivocally reconfirmed support for a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 lines and its Charter-based principled positions. It reiterated that Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are illegal. The acquisition of territory by force is inadmissible. All parties must take immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, as well as acts of provocation and destruction.

The international community must distinguish, in its relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, that is, all lands occupied since 1967. The Council also urged the intensification and acceleration of international and regional efforts aimed at achieving the two-State solution.

Breaking its silence of nearly seven years on this issue with resolution 2334 (2016), the Council has generated a unique momentum for peace in a very difficult environment by reaffirming the core purposes and principles of the Organization and the parameters of the international consensus on resolving the question of Palestine. That momentum must be maintained at all cost and the international community, most notably the Council, must follow up on its determination to secure the full implementation of this and its other relevant resolutions, rally around the legal principles set out in the resolution and hold perpetrators accountable for violations of international norms. The Committee looks forward to the Secretary-General's reporting on the implementation of the provisions of the resolution.

Similarly, the Committee welcomes the joint declaration issued at the Paris Conference over the weekend, in which participants welcomed international efforts to advance Middle East peace, including through adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), and reiterated that a negotiated two-State solution should meet the legitimate aspirations of both sides, including Palestinians' right to statehood and sovereignty, fully end the occupation that began in 1967, satisfy Israel's security needs and resolve all permanent status issues on the basis of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). While the joint declaration did not go far enough in condemning those who seek to actively undermine this outcome, the Committee urges all interested parties to ensure that the two-State solution remains a realistic possibility and that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace is achieved.

As thoroughly documented by United Nations agencies and others, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, remains dire and the two-State solution is in real peril. The Committee urges the international community to actively seize the moment and exert collective efforts to ensure the reversal of the negative trends on the ground and the launch of credible negotiations on all final status issues in the Middle East peace process with a view to achieving a comprehensive peace agreement that justly resolves all final status issues. Both Israelis and Palestinians must show leadership and make the difficult decisions required for peace.

During this year, tragically marking 50 years of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, the international community must spare no effort to ensure that this untenable situation is ended and that the Palestinian aspirations for independence and sovereignty in their State, as well as Israeli security needs, are met. The Committee will mark this solemn anniversary by organizing several events, in the hope of drawing attention to the continuing plight of the Palestinian people in all its dimensions and generating further momentum towards ending the Israeli occupation. The Committee, lastly, calls upon all States and organizations to enhance their cooperation and support to the Committee in the performance of its General Assembly mandate, including with respect to achieving the end of the Israeli occupation, the capacity-building of the State of Palestine and recognition on the basis of the 1967 borders and its eventual admission to full membership in the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Rivero Rosario (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The situation in the Middle East continues to be very complex and to be marked by instability and insecurity. The Palestinian people continue to suffer the illegal foreign occupation of Israel and suffer under Israeli policies and practices, in serious violation of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights.

We welcome the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), in accordance with the Security Council's primary role in the maintaining international peace and security, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. That resolution reaffirmed, inter alia, the illegality of Israeli settlement activities and reiterated the call for Israel to immediately and fully cease from all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in accordance with international law.

However, while the resolution is a step in the right direction, it is still not enough. This year is the fiftieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, which marks 50 years of systematic abuses, acts of aggression, killings and human rights violations. As an international community we owe a debt to the Palestinian people. It is time to break the silence and the stalemate that have led to the suffering of the Palestinian people of abuse and to put an end to the impunity of Israel's criminal actions against Palestine.

We call once again on the Security Council to adopt the necessary decisions and demand that Israel put an immediate end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and other Arab territories; an end to the blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has gone on for more than 10 years and where 2 million Palestinians are being collectively punished and besieged, threatened and exposed to extreme deprivation and isolation, which has resulted in a serious humanitarian crisis; an end to the building and expansion of Israeli settlements and the separation wall in occupied Palestinian territory; an end to the destruction and confiscation of Palestinian lands and property; and an end to the forced displacement and the transfer of settlers to occupied Palestinian territory, among other violations of international law, international humanitarian law, human rights, the rights of the Palestinian people and United Nations resolutions.

Until the Security Council takes on its responsibility and implements not only resolution 2334 (2016) but also additional concrete actions that contribute to the search for effective solutions to the conflict, Israel will continue to entrench the occupation, making the two-State solution inviable and preventing a fair and peaceful solution to it.

We call again on the international community to take a firm and principled stand that will address all the illegal actions of Israel against the Palestinian people and its property, before it is too late.

We reiterate that the only possible solution to the question of Palestine is the peaceful coexistence of two independent States, with the establishment of an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, with its capital in East Jerusalem and respecting the pre-1967 borders. We also support the admission of Palestine as a full-fledged Member of the Organization. We reiterate our call to the Security Council to take action to that end. That would undoubtedly be another step on the right path. If it is not done, the General Assembly should act with full determination to decide on the case.

As on other occasions, we reiterate our condemnation of the politicization of the Syrian crisis and the manipulation of the humanitarian situation and of the suffering of the Syrian people, which suits the dominating geopolitical interests of countries that pursue the declared objective of imposing a regime change in Syria. We also condemn the double standard. It cannot be repeated often enough that those who speak against Syria all too often forget the major humanitarian needs of the besieged Gaza Strip. It cannot be overlooked that those who urge the General Assembly to pronounce itself on alleged and unrecognized crimes committed in Syria do not urge the Assembly to rule on the inclusion of the State of Palestine as a full-fledged Member of the United Nations or to review the crimes committed against the Palestinian people.

Those who have fuelled the conflict in Syria — by providing weapons and financing and sponsorship to terrorist groups from the outside — are responsible for the thousands of civilians who have fallen victim to the conflict and the humanitarian situation. We reject the promotion of an interventionist agenda as a means of solving the crisis in Syria. Cuba deeply deplores and mourns the loss of innocent lives as a consequence of the situation. We condemn all of the acts of violence against the civilian population in Syria. We call for a halt to the violations of Syrian sovereignty and the foreign military presence that are not subject to the consent of and coordination of operations by the Syrian Government, the only legitimately elected authority in Syria. A political solution — reached through dialogue and negotiations and without preconditions — is the only viable way out of the conflict in Syria. In that vein, we welcome the adoption by the Security Council on 31 December 2016 of resolution 2336 (2016), negotiated by Russia and Turkey, which supports the ceasefire in Syria, as well as the re-opening of direct political negotiations between the Syrian Government and the armed opposition, which will take place at the end of January in Astana. Peace in Syria can be achieved only through respect for the right of the Syrian people to decide their own fate without foreign interference and impositions. We support the Syrian people and their aspirations to live in peace and choose their own destiny.

To conclude, we reiterate our support for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the conflicts in the Middle East, which will make it possible to safeguard the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of all States in the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): The nature of the current conflicts requires us to intensify our efforts to achieve peace and security. The tireless work and perseverance on the part of responsible members of the international community have paved the way to the adoption of important resolutions in the past few months by the Security Council and the General Assembly on the questions of Palestine and Syria. Those positive steps can make a difference only if they are fully implemented on the ground.

Turkey supports all initiatives that revitalize the Middle East peace process, address the long-standing vacuum on the political track and preserve the letter and spirit of the established parameters. We will not cease our efforts to reach a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, which would include the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In that regard, we welcome the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), which reflects the widespread agreement on the negative impact on the two-State solution of Israel's illegal settlement activities. That resolution, as well as the recent Paris Middle East Peace Conference, in which Turkey also participated, represent steps in the right direction in reaffirming the international community's commitment to the two-State vision.

In the meantime, Israel should immediately cease all settlement activities, as well as the demolition of housing, land confiscation and other policies that deny Palestinians their right to development. The continuation of those practices deepens the sense of injustice, creates a growing mistrust towards the international community and breeds desperation. Needless to say, that is in nobody's interest. Furthermore, attempts to alter the historical status of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and increasing violations of its sanctity, as well as measures violating the freedom of worship, jeopardize peaceful coexistence. Palestinians should be able to sit at the negotiation table as the State of Palestine, equal to Israel. In that regard, the recognition of the State of Palestine by more than the current 137 countries and its full integration to international forums are vital. Palestinian reconciliation is also an important component of the lasting peace, and Turkey continues its efforts to that end.

As part of the agreement on the normalization of Turkish-Israeli relations, the Ambassadors of both countries have recently assumed their duties in Ankara and Tel Aviv, respectively. That will enable us to restore our bilateral relations in many fields and increase our contributions aimed at addressing the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and the development needs of the West Bank. Currently, we are focusing on the urgent needs of the Palestinian people, in particular the electricity and water shortages, as well as health and housing issues. We have sent two technical missions to Gaza to assess the infrastructure. Our humanitarian aid delivery to Gaza will continue regularly.

Turkey has been undertaking intensive efforts to end the violence in Syria, ensure the unfettered flow of humanitarian aid and reach a political solution based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex), as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). To that end, we have done our utmost to ensure the safe and secure evacuation of people from eastern Aleppo. We were pleased to see that those efforts, along with our call for an emergency special session at the General Assembly, led to the unanimous adoption of resolution 2328 (2016). That was a modest but promising step after a long silence regarding Syria in the Council. Following the decisive role that Turkey played in the evacuation of 45,000 people from eastern Aleppo, we facilitated and became the guarantors of an understanding reached by the warring parties on a countrywide ceasefire. The unanimous adoption of resolution 2336 (2016) demonstrated the international community's support for that process and reconfirmed the link between our efforts and the meticulous work undertaken by the United Nations.

With the ceasefire in place, we have covered significant ground. Our aim is to ensure a sustainable and functional continuation of that understanding. So far, working with our Russian counterparts, we have been able to contain the violations by the regime and the foreign militia elements. Violators are warned through appropriate channels. However, the process remains fragile. The maintenance of the ceasefire is decisive, if we wish to unblock the political solution. That is exactly why the period ahead will be critical, particularly the next two weeks. We invite all actors to exercise their influence in order to reach the goal desired.

Our efforts are aimed at restarting the political track from the point where it left off in April 2016. The preparations for the meeting to be held in Astana with the presence of the United Nations are ongoing. The Astana meeting will be complementary and supportive to the political process led by the United Nations and represents an important confidence-building step ahead of the resumption of negotiations in Geneva on 8 February.

While we refocus on our efforts on the ceasefire and political talks, accountability remains a central concern. Reconciliation and sustainable peace in Syria will be based on our success in that matter. In that regard, the adoption of resolution 71/248 by the General Assembly is a significant development.

Let me conclude by reiterating our strong will, working with our partners, to continue to support the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people in the coming period.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We condemn Mr. Mladenov's continued failure to deal with the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan and with ongoing Israeli violations and practices there, which are part of this particular agenda item. They also form an integral part of Mr. Mladenov's mandate as Special Coordinator.

This debate coincides with the upcoming 50-year anniversary of Israel's occupation of Arab territories. That includes systematic and documented violations by Israel of international humanitarian law and human rights law. The international community has not taken real steps to end the occupation, which has encouraged Israel to escalate its aggression and its unprecedented settlement policy, the latest illustration of which is the bill seeking to legalize the outposts.

The Security Council should immediately implement resolution 2334 (2016). That resolution, which was adopted weeks ago, condemns settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory. The resolution should also apply to Israeli occupation policies in the occupied Syrian Golan. The Israeli Government decided to establish 19 new districts and 400 housing units in Katzrin settlement, built on the ruins of the Syrian village of Kasreen, and has increased the settlers' numbers in the occupied Syrian Golan by adding 750 farms. Those are matters not covered by Mr. Mladenov in his briefing.

Syria has a principled position in support of the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, to an independent State on all of its national territory, with Jerusalem as its capital, and to the right of return in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948. The war from which we suffer in Syria is due in large part to our refusal to succumb to pressure to relinquish our support for the Palestinian people and their just cause.

Israel still refuses to return the occupied Syrian Golan to our homeland of Syria. Moreover, Israel has not implemented resolution 497 (1981). It continues systematically to violate international humanitarian law and human rights law with respect to our people in the occupied Syrian Golan, with a view to erasing the Syrian identity of the Golan and separating it from the Syrian motherland. Israel has confiscated land, expanded settlements and demolished homes. Recently, that Government demolished the home of citizen Bassam Ibrahim. Israel also arrested an elderly man, aged 70, named Asa'ad Al-Waly, who died days ago in an Israeli prison after being sentenced to eight months of imprisonment for building a home on his own land. That is a violation of international law, which prohibits any occupying forces from confiscating the property of the citizens of occupied territory, in this case the Golan. The Golan is Arab Syrian land that Syrians have inherited from their ancestors.

Israel continues looting the resources of the Golan, distorting its history and plundering its antiquities, and has planted more than 20 million land mines. It has deprived steadfast Syrians on their territory of the right to study using the Syrian national education curriculum in Arabic. It has deprived them of the right to carry Syrian identity cards and the to build national Syrian hospitals. Israel continues its arrest and coercion policy, victimizing scores of Syrians in the Golan. The Syrian Government calls for pressuring Israel for the immediate release from prison of Sidqui Al-Maqt — the Syrian Mandela — and his co-prisoners Iyad Al-Johari and Amal Abu Saleh, who are being held in inhumane conditions in Israeli detention centres, as well as rescinding the unjust sentences of Amal Abu Saleh and a female prisoner, Bashira Mahmoud.

Since the beginning of the events in Syria, Israel, the occupying Power, has added a new chapter to its annals of terrorist aggression, in direct violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and Security Council resolutions, in particular those resolutions concerning counter-terrorism. It has provided support of all kinds to armed terrorist groups in the area of separation in the occupied Syrian Golan, including the Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, facilitating their crossing of the ceasefire line. It treats wounded terrorists in its hospitals with a view to allowing them to return to Syria and continue their terrorist activities. It has built a two-kilometre berm that crosses the ceasefire line, with illegal gates for use by armed terrorist groups, to the great concern of the Syrian Government and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. That is well known to the member States of the Council, but apparently not to Mr. Mladenov.

While continuing its terrorism, policies of aggression and defiance of international laws, norms and resolutions and its support to terrorist groups, Israel perpetrated a new, treacherous act of aggression against the territory of Syria after midnight on 13 January. The launch of a large number missiles by its warplanes north of Lake Tiberias, led to a fire on the periphery of Al-Mezzeh airport in Damascus. Apparently Mr. Mladenov and the United Nations do not know about that particular act of aggression. This illustrates that Israel and terrorism are two sides of the same coins.

We call upon the Security Council to take immediate action to punish Israel for its aggression and to prevent it from being repeated. The Security Council is also called upon to take immediate action against Israel and force it to end its aggression and violations and its occupation of the occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan, and to withdraw to withdraw to the borders of 4 June 1967 in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 497 (1981) and 2334 (2016). We reiterate that Syria has a sovereign right over the occupied Syrian Golan up to the line of 4 June 1967. It is not a right that is up for negotiation, nor can it be waived. We are not asking for concessions from Israel, which it describes as painful. We are referring to lands and rights that have been usurped and should be restored to their rightful owners and holders. Israeli settlers will have to leave our land in Golan sooner or later.

In conclusion, we reject the attempts by some delegations to undermine the substance of the item on today's agenda, which is dedicated to discussing how to end the Israeli occupation of Arab lands, including the Syrian Golan, and not to attempts to mislead the Council through the discussion of the internal affairs of countries. Not wanting to be part of those reprehensible attempts, I will not reply or respond to the false allegations made by certain countries, especially those that harbour, support and finance terrorists, or that promote sabotage and extremism in Syria and are working hard to derail any peaceful solution to this crisis by intervening in our internal affairs — in particular Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, the United States, France and others. They use the diaspora of global terrorism as a political tool to put pressure on my Government to change its choices and positions.

The President: I remind speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes. Delegations with lengthy statements are encouraged to circulate their texts in writer and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): We join other Member States in expressing our appreciation to Sweden for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. It is our belief that these periodic open debates are necessary in order to mobilize the international community, especially the Security Council, and to assist both Israel and Palestine in finding a lasting solution to the conflict that continues to prevail in both of those countries.

As we engage in this important open debate, we need to reflect on resolution 2334 (2016), adopted in late December 2016. The Security Council's decision is welcome and long overdue, bearing in mind that that was the first time since January 2009 that the Council was able to adopt a decision on the Middle East peace process. What is of specific relevance regarding resolution 2334 (2016) is the fact that it emphasizes the illegal nature of the activities undertaken by the Government of Israel, which include the building of settlements, the confiscation of land, the demolition of Palestinian property and the displacement of Palestinians. The resolution conveys the resolve of the Security Council not to recognize any changes to the internationally agreed lines of 4 June 1967 as the basis of a negotiated settlement.

My delegation wishes to highlight the fact that Israel, as a State Member of the United Nations, is obliged, under Article 25 of the Charter, to comply with the decisions of the Security Council.

In that regard, South Africa urges Israel to comply with all of its obligations under international law.

The reality, however, is that the illegal Israeli settlements continue unabated. They have led to the fragmentation of the West Bank and continue to threaten the viability and territorial contiguity of a future Palestinian State. The illegal and unilateral Israeli policies, practices and activities impede the peace process. We also believe firmly that continuing the settlement activities will undermine Israel's own immediate and long-term security prospects and help to radicalize the entire region.

Negotiations and dialogue are the only way forward, if we are to reach a lasting solution. The guidelines for the negotiations are based on an established international legal framework that includes the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, to mention only a few of its elements. South Africa supports all international efforts aimed at brokering a just solution to the Israeli-Palestine conflict. In that regard, we welcome the Middle East Peace Conference held in Paris this past weekend and align ourselves with the statement issued there. We regard it as a vehicle that can help to relaunch effective and serious peace talks between Israel and Palestine, leading to the creation of an independent, free and sovereign Palestinian State coexisting side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel, based on the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In conclusion, South Africa is of the opinion that negotiations between Palestine and Israel should take place within a clear, mutually agreed-on framework that includes a reasonable timetable and clear sanctions to be applied to parties that do not live up to their commitments. An open-ended approach and process are by now a luxury that the international community cannot afford, given the changing reality on the ground in Palestine, which poses an immense risk to the achievement of a viable, contiguous and independent Palestinian State, as well as of an escalation in violence.

Fifty years of occupation is too long. South Africa would like to emphasize once again that, at the end of the day, the prime responsibility for peace falls squarely in the hands of both Palestine and Israel. As the international community, we can only support, encourage, advise and thereafter reward.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mrs. Adnin (Malaysia): I would like to thank you, Sir, for convening and presiding over today's meeting. I am also grateful to Mr. Mladenov for his briefing and frank assessments.

My delegation associates itself with the statements to be delivered by the representatives of Venezuela and Uzbekistan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

In December 2016, less than a month ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), on the illegal Israeli settlements, a resolution sponsored by Malaysia, together with New Zealand, Senegal and Venezuela. After more than three decades of inaction on the part of the Council, which have led to Israel's relentless and systematic settlement expansion in complete disregard for international law and the views of an overwhelming majority of the international community, the Council finally decided to take action to preserve the possibility of a two-State solution. The delay in that action has come at a great cost to peace and the idea of a two-State solution.

Over the decades, the illegal settlements and the settler population have multiplied, undermining and fragmenting the contiguity and territorial integrity of a potential Palestinian State, including East Jerusalem. They have also physically threatened the viability and prospects for the physical realization of a two-State solution on a basis of the pre-1967 borders. We have seen how settlement expansion has led to the demolition of Palestinian homes, the forced displacement of Palestinian families, increasing violence on the part of settlers, and discriminatory policies, as well as to the denial to the Palestinians of their development, infrastructure and access to natural resources. The strong support that we received from Council members and the international community for resolution 2334 (2016) reflected a realization of the urgency and importance of reversing the negative trends that threaten peace and the viability of a two-State solution.

In view of Israel's worrying and aggressive response to the resolution, Malaysia urges the international community and the Council to remain firm and not give in to threats, intimidation and pressure, while upholding international law, international human rights standards and the various relevant United

Nations resolutions. In the next few months, the parties involved and the international community should focus on implementing resolution 2334 (2016), including the provisions relating to settlements and acts of violence and incitement against civilians. We expect to see a written report every three months from the Secretary-General on the resolution's implementation.

The international community must not remain a bystander as the situation on the ground worsens. In that regard, Malaysia welcomed the holding two days ago of the Paris Middle East Peace Conference. We will continue to support France's efforts to mobilize the international community and its commitment to a two-State solution. We seek to create an environment conducive to pushing the parties towards a resumption of the peace process.

In conclusion, Malaysia would like to reiterate the importance of addressing the root causes of the conflict by ending the repressive military occupation of Palestine. That prolonged occupation has created and sustained the settlement enterprise and has spread further despair, frustration and insecurity in the region and beyond. As we begin 2017, which marks 70 years of Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine, we must redouble our efforts to end the longest occupation in modern history. Malaysia remains committed to playing a constructive role in realizing a two-State solution. We reiterate our long-standing support for the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and to a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Mendoza-García (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to commend you and the Swedish Mission, Mr. President, on the work you are doing in the Security Council this month. We are also grateful for today's briefings.

I will focus on two issues in the region, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the situation in Syria, while reiterating our position that a diplomatic solution is required in both cases.

In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, my country emphasizes how urgent it is to ensure a resumption of negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis on the persistent core issues in the conflict. A political solution should be based on the previous obligations and agreements already arrived at between the parties, supported by international law and the decisions of both the Security Council and the General Assembly. It is vital that we achieve a political solution to the conflict and create, with all possible speed, a new peace architecture for resolving differences. We need a sustainable peace aimed at establishing the foundations for direct negotiations leading to a goal that is acceptable to the international community — that of the harmonious coexistence of the State of Israel and a viable, independent Palestinian State. Costa Rica remains convinced that a two-State solution is the only possible way for both States and their peoples to live side by side in peace and security.

We therefore welcomed the Security Council's adoption, on 23 December, of resolution 2334 (2016), which reiterates the consensus established in the international community that the settlements have no legal validity and urges all parties to work collectively to initiate credible negotiations on all the final status issues in the peace process. We reiterate our support for the use of international law as a tool in the peaceful settlement of disputes and for the position of the Security Council and the General Assembly as bodies created to preserve international peace and security. We urge respect for and compliance with the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016), which is binding on every State Member of the Organization.

With regard to the conflict in Syria, we welcome the adoption by the General Assembly of resolutions 71/130, of 9 December 2016, and 71/248, of 21 December 2016. We reiterate our position, given the grave nature of the crimes that may have been committed and the level of destruction of Syria, that we need to have accountability mechanisms in place in order to recover, safeguard and consolidate the evidence that would enable us to bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice in the future. We understand that, given the terrible dynamics of the Syrian conflict, some legal processes will begin in the future. For that very reason, it is urgent to compile as much evidence as possible. We also highlight the importance that such a mechanism should be financed through the United Nations regular budget.

The international community has long waited for a Security Council agreement on Syria. We therefore welcome the fact that the Security Council was able to adopt resolutions 2328 (2016) and 2336 (2016) unanimously. That represents a significant step forward in the work of the Council and an important initial step for our efforts to find a lasting solution to the conflict. We reiterate our conviction that the only lasting solution to the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic will be achieved through diplomatic channels. In that regard, we call upon all States to respect and implement the resolutions adopted by the Security Council and by the General Assembly.

Costa Rica urges that the efforts of the international community should not cease until a final ceasefire has been achieved through an agreement that covers all the parties concerned. We wish to recall that the Security Council has the power to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court in the event that States with primary jurisdiction did not exercise it and also in the face of the mass atrocities committed there.

In conclusion, Costa Rica reiterates its concern at the growing tension among regional Powers, which has raised the tone in those confrontations. We therefore make a robust appeal for peace in the Middle East. As Members of the Organization, we have a legal, political and moral responsibility to prevent and stop any act that leads to the death of innocents. We should support and enhance those mechanisms that allow us to bring to justice those responsible and combine our efforts to stop the spiral of violence and end the suffering of civilians. That is the only way that we can feel satisfied that we have complied with the provisions established in the Charter of the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Ms. Krisnamurthi (Indonesia): Let me begin by commending the delegation of Sweden on its assumption of membership in the Security Council and on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of January, as well as for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. My delegation would also like to take a moment to welcome the other new members of the Council, namely, Bolivia, Ethiopia, Italy and Kazakhstan. We wish them a very productive term. I also thank Special Envoy Mladenov for his briefing.

This open debate is taking place only two days after the adoption of the joint statement at the Middle East Peace Conference in Paris, which reaffirmed that the two-State solution is the only way to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The joint statement also welcomed the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), which, among other things, condemns the settlement activity. Indonesia wishes to express its full support for those positive outcomes — the resolution and the joint statement — produced within less than a month of each other, and to congratulate the Council and the Government of France for the progress achieved.

In resolution 2334 (2016) the Council stresses that the cessation of all Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory is essential if we wish to salvage the two-State solution. It also calls for affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse the negative trends on the ground that are imperilling the two-State solution.

In a bold move, the Council reaffirmed that Israel's establishment of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity, constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and is a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. The Council further reiterated its demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and that Israel fully respect all of its legal obligations in that regard.

Resolution 2234 (2016) was long in coming. Since 2009 the Council has not adopted a single resolution concerning Palestine, nor have any of its resolutions spoken of the illegality of the settlements for over 30 years. On that account, my delegation commends the members of the Security Council that supported the resolution, particularly its co-sponsors.

While the resolution is a landmark achievement, some specific provisions are particularly significant, including the declaration that no recognition of any change to the line of 4 June 1967, including with regard to Jerusalem, will take place, other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations. Another extremely significant achievement of the resolution is the call upon all States, bearing in mind the declared illegality of the settlements, to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. We are also pleased that the resolution mandates the Secretary-General to report to the Council every three months concerning the implementation of its provisions.

While the letter of that resolution is mighty, its spirit is mightier. What the resolution actually implies is the change of heart in the Council that many delegations in the Organization, including mine, have called for for many years. That change of heart affirms clearly and firmly the recognition that change will not come in the Middle East as long as Israel's construction of the settlements and its arrogant ignoring of international law continue. It is that change of heart that clarifies that any settlements built illegally since 1967 remain illegal and will not be recognized.

What next? The 2017 billion-dollar question is expressed in one word: implementation, implementation and implementation. A resolution, whether an institutional one or one made personally in the new year, is meaningless if it is not implemented. That is why, while we praise the courage behind the adoption of the resolution, the challenge is in the tangible and effective implementation that it demands. If settlement construction by Israel was illegal before, if it constituted a flagrant violation of international law and a major obstacle to peace and the viability of the two-State solution based on 1967 borders, it is even more profoundly so since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) last month.

We have therefore arrived at the point where the Council must demonstrate the mettle of which it is made, on the side of right over wrong, justice over injustice. The Council has the moral obligation to be on the right side of history. The evidence so far is unflattering, as previous resolutions — like reports by United Nations-appointed representatives, rapporteurs and commissions — have often been trampled upon by Israel, and then eventually ignored by the United Nations itself. In our view, the failure to implement that resolution would finally frustrate the hopes of all Palestinians, and even of the majority of Israelis, who simply want to live side by side in peace with their neighbours.

Finally, my delegation would like to stress that even the cessation of settlements can only be the beginning of a long process. The parties must start the negotiation process without delay and commit to addressing the root causes of the problem. In that regard, it our hope that the newly elected members of the Council will also lend their support to, and support the implementation of, that historic resolution in this the fiftieth year of Israel's occupation of Palestine.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Lal (India): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on the Middle East. These quarterly meetings of the Security Council serve as a stark reminder that the situation in the Middle East remains fragile and that peace and reconciliation continue to elude us. Violence and terror continue unabated, leading to widespread suffering and large-scale exoduses of refugees. Those effects are being felt far and wide.

These quarterly deliberations are also a pointer towards the interconnectedness of peace and security across regions and the importance, therefore, that the international community attaches to the pursuit of a peaceful and just resolution of those conflicts. However, international efforts have proved largely insufficient and ineffective in addressing the multiple challenges to peace and security in the region.

Despite that gloomy backdrop, we can discern, as we commence a new year, at least some developments that can offer some hope, including the Middle East peace process, the recent Syrian truce and the formation of a national unity Government in Lebanon.

The lack of any significant forward movement on the Palestine issue, ever since the collapse of talks nearly three years ago, continues to be a cause for concern. The past one and half years has seen a further deterioration of the security situation in Palestine. Only a negotiated two-State solution can bring about sustainable peace and lasting security.

There is therefore an imperative need for restraint and moderation on all sides. We stress that it is the collective responsibility of the two sides to ensure that they move closer to a solution. We welcome the latest efforts by the international community to promote peace through the recently concluded Middle East Peace Conference in Paris, in which more than 70 countries, including India, participated. At the same time, India continues to invest through its development efforts, including through capacity-building and skills-development, so as to empower Palestinian youth with opportunities to improve their lives.

The truce in Syria, which came into effect on 30 December, was a much-needed positive development. We welcome all efforts to end violence in Syria and to jump-start the political process. In that context, we welcome resolution 2336 (2016), adopted a few weeks ago. During his recent visit to Syria, India's Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. Mobashar Jawed

Akbar, expressed the hope that the age of destruction would give way to reconstruction in Syria, and that the solution to the crisis in Syria should be worked out through a comprehensive political process that achieves and accommodates the aspirations of the Syrian people.

We look forward to the outcome of the direct talks scheduled for later this month in Astana. It is encouraging that the process is committed to the principles of the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and is led and owned by Syria. Meaningful involvement by the United Nations is also essential to the process.

In Lebanon, the recent election of President Michel Aoun and the subsequent formation of a national unity Government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Saad Hariri, have been further positive developments. In his congratulatory message, the President of India expressed our hope that the new presidency will usher in an era of political stability and progress in Lebanon. We hope that those developments will also be helpful from the perspective of regional stability. Lebanon's example of resolving complex sectarian issues via institutional means through political processes can serve as valuable lessons for other similar situations in the region.

Whether it is "salaam" or "shalom", the deep-seated yearning for peace across peoples is only too evident. We hope that 2017 will bring about a surge in diplomacy for peace, as has been called for by the new Secretary-General. Pragmatism and compromise are essential for moving forward for the greater interests of all. History has shown that only peaceful coexistence is sustainable in the long term.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Venezuela.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank you, Mr. President, and your delegation for having convened this extremely important open debate in the light of recent events and the persistent situation in the Middle East. We also express our gratitude to the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing. We convey our appreciation and support for his tireless efforts in the quest for just and sustainable political solutions that will help bring the conflict to an end and achieve peace in that tumultuous region.

Venezuela sees terrorism as one of the major threats and destabilizing elements in the region. In that regard, we categorically condemn all terrorist acts and groups, whoever its perpetrators may be and whatever its goals. Our statement will focus on the Palestinian question, as that protracted conflict continues to be a significant source of tension in the complicated panorama that prevails in that region.

Resolution 2334 (2016), of 23 December 2016, which condemns the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, was adopted by consensus and co-sponsored by my country at the end of our term in the Security Council as a non-permament member, and has undoubtedly contributed to bringing to the attention of the international community the terrible impact of the occupation of Palestinian territory on the hundreds of thousands of men, women and children whose daily lives and most fundamental rights are compromised by the illegal Israeli policies, the occupying Power, which arrogantly and cruelly oppresses them and denies them their right to exist in a sovereign, independent and viable State.

In that context, we regret the violent, threatening and arrogant reaction of the Israeli Government to resolution 2334 (2016). Instead of heeding and complying with the Council's resolutions and mandates, as called for in the Charter of the United Nations, that Government continues to defy the international community, declaring that there will be more settlements and threatening those countries that continue to insist on the two-State solution and on compliance with international law.

Nevertheless, Venezuela hopes that the Security Council will continue to do its utmost to achieve the effective implementation of that crucially important resolution, which includes the requirement that Israel immediately and totally cease all illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and that measures be adopted to safeguard the Palestinian people from the continued violations of international law and international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory, which have been occurring for 50 years, and in the Gaza Strip, which for almost 10 years has been subject to an inhumane and brutal blockade by Israel.

The two-State solution continues to be the only possible way to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In that regard, we welcome France's diplomatic efforts, which culminated in the convening of 70 countries on 15 January at the Paris Middle East Peace Conference, in which Venezuela participated with the strong desire to join its voice with others who called for a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the conflict, based on the existence of two States, Israel and Palestine — as a full-fledged United Nations Member and with East Jerusalem as its capital — living in peace within secure and internationally recognized pre-1967 borders. We note the total consistency between the points agreed in the joint statement adopted at the Paris Conference and the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016), which shows that the Council's document fully reflects the concerns of the international community regarding the conflict and its willingness to seek short-term solutions that do not eliminate the possibility of reaching a political solution in the form of a two-State solution.

We also commend the fact that the statement adopted in Paris noted the importance of providing ongoing financial support to the Palestinian Authority so that it can build the necessary infrastructure for a viable Palestinian economy. We welcome the goodwill of the States and organizations that attended the Conference, and we reiterate our support for that collective effort to achieve peace in the Middle East, as well as the work of the Middle East Quartet and initiatives from countries like Egypt and Russia that seek to promote political processes and conversations between Israel and Palestine, with a view to reaching agreements on the basis of the two-State solution, which should take into account the Arab Peace Initiative, the terms adopted at the Madrid Peace Conference and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

We believe that Israel must stop turning its back on international law and we demand that it do so. Israel must heed the calls of so many in the international community for the resumption of an open and honest political discussion with the Palestinian Authority based on the existence of two States in order to initiate a process that will put an end to the tragedy of the Palestinian people, that will put an end to the illegal occupation of its territory, and that will put an end to put an end to one of the greatest abuses committed against a people in the contemporary history of the world.

Venezuela is waiting for Israel to listen. Venezuela expects Israel to cease its arrogance and violence. Venezuela expects and demands that Israel shall cease to violate the human rights of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, including more than 700 children in Israeli prisons. Not only do we reiterate the importance and the need for the members of the Organization and the Security Council, the organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, to remain attentive to future developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to be an element of support and assistance for the parties as they search for peace, but we do so with special emphasis on the importance of defending the weaker party, namely, the occupied Palestinian people.

In this way, we will ensure that agreements resulting from resolutions, declarations, discussions and multilateral and direct negotiations go beyond the population in question and open the way in 2017, "the year of peace", in the words of Secretary-General António Guterres, for the end of the occupation, in accordance with resolution 242 (1967), and the emergence of a Palestinian State on an equal footing with all the nations of the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): The delegation of Bangladesh thank the Swedish presidency for organizing today's quarterly debate.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, who spoke on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Uzbekistan, who will speak on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. This protracted situation has been a sheer affront to the values and principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter. There is every reason for the States Members of the United Nations to collectively question and re-examine this untenable status quo. As we witness wilful provocations to further diminish the prospects of a two-State solution, the urgency of reorienting the political horizon towards resuming the Middle East peace process cannot be overstated here in the Security Council.

The International peace conference held in Paris on 15 January was a clear proof of the sense of urgency held by the international community. The message has been unequivocal. The quest for a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestinian question must be pursued earnestly, all the more so given the backdrop of a volatile regional security situation. We could agree more with the French Minister for Foreign Affairs when, in an op-ed piece in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, he wrote,

> "Thinking that the Middle East could restore its stability without settling its oldest conflict is unrealistic. This conflict, if not dealt with, will continue to fuel frustration and will ultimately only worsen the vicious cycle of radicalization and violence. It will continue to give budding terrorists excuses for enlisting."

A recent survey of a relatively small segment of our population conducted in an online interface on discontents giving rise to violent extremist attitudes has revealed that the situation of Muslims under foreign occupation and other forms of systematic discrimination ranks first among the list of such discontents. For those who wish to ignore the underlying root causes of the recent rise of violent extremism across the globe, such evidence-based findings should provide some food for thought.

There is near-unanimity in the international community that the continued expansion of Israeli settlements constitutes one of the most blatant manifestations of the injustice committed against the Palestinian people and poses a serious impediment to the resumption and pursuit of the peace process. The adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) by the Security Council last month has reaffirmed the illegality of the settlements and prevailed upon the occupying Power to halt further expansion of settlements and stop attempts to give legitimacy to the existing ones. In fact, the wise words of the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine earlier today sums it all up:

> "The will of the Council, and of the international community as a whole, to stand by the resolution and implement its provisions will be an indicator of whether the two-State solution can be saved or not and whether peace will be possible or not."

For its part, Bangladesh will continue to add its voice in support of implementing resolution 2334 (2016) and for the moment of truth it ushers in for peace, justice and the international rule of law. As reiterated by our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during her meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Palestine recently, the Government and the people of Bangladesh will remain steadfast in advocating in favour of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to return, self-determination and an independent and viable State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): I would like to start by first conveying Pakistan's conviction that the leadership, energy and dynamism of Secretary-General António Guterres will help us in healing the complex conflicts and crises in the Middle East and in restoring world order which is being threatened today from multiple directions.

For 50 years, Israel has persisted in its occupation of the West Bank in defiance of the United Nations Charter's central tenet that territories cannot be acquired through the use of force or aggression. None of the basic foundations for lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinian people — Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 242 (1967), demanding Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, the Oslo Accords outlining the principle of land for peace, and the general consensus of the international community for a two-State solution — have been implemented by the occupying Power.

It is our conviction that enduring peace in the Middle East is inconceivable without a just resolution of the Palestine-Israel dispute. The establishment of an viable independent and contiguous State of Palestine on the basis of internationally agreed parameters, the pre-1967 borders, and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, is the only sustainable guarantee for peace. It is clear that the transfer of any State's embassy to Jerusalem will also manifestly violate Security Council resolutions.

The international conference on the Middle East peace process, held in Paris over the weekend, is a welcome step in the right direction. With over 70 States in attendance, the conference reaffirmed the primacy of the two-State solution. There must be consequences for those who continue to defy the force of international consensus.

We are also following with great dismay the tense situation unfolding in Gaza, after 2 million Palestinians have been left with just a couple of hours of electricity a day in the middle of winter. We call for full respect of the right to freedom of expression, peaceful protest and assembly in Gaza.

Palestine, the Holy Land, is the heart of the Arab and Islamic world. What happens to Palestine and its people will resonate throughout the region. Let us not forget that the basic narrative of the region's extremists is that Muslim peoples can secure justice only through resort to force and violence. It will be difficult to defeat this narrative — and extremist ideologies — unless we bring peace and justice of the Palestinian people.

Resolution 2334 (2016), recently adopted by the Council, affirmed the self-evident conclusion that the continuing expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank are likely to foreclose a two-State solution and eliminate the prospects of a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Pakistan welcomes the Council's adoption of this resolution. Not surprisingly, the resolution has been opposed by the occupying Power. But others who have sought to apply pressure and coercion on members of the Security Council and on the United Nations display their own narrow and deeply flawed vision. Resolution 2334 (2016) must be expeditiously and fully implemented by the parties concerned.

The fratricide in Syria is now almost six years old. The human suffering it has caused is unprecedented in recent history. We have collectively missed many opportunities to end this tragic conflict over this period. Yet another such opportunity now beckons. With a Russia-Turkey-brokered ceasefire backed by resolution 2336 (2016) still holding, Syrians have started believing again. Their eyes are now set on the peace talks in Astana on 23 January. Those tentative beginnings must be nurtured and regional and international players must stay firm in their resolve to bring peace back to Syria. That can be achieved if the legitimate interests of all States and parties involved are equitably accommodated and a viable coalition formed to defeat Da'esh and other terrorist groups. Even as Iraqi and coalition forces retake Mosul and defeat Da'esh, thought must turn to building durable structures of peace through the recognition and reconciliation of the interests of all of Iraq's people.

Despite the untiring shuttle diplomacy of Special Envoy Ismail Ahmed, Yemen continues to burn. The extended war is grinding the country further into poverty. The situation has been further exacerbated by the external arming and encouragement of certain groups. The endeavours of the Special Envoy must be fully supported by all parties to restore peace with dignity for our Yemeni brothers and our Yemeni sisters.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Alhakim (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to congratulate the Kingdom of Sweden on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month, and thank it for convening today's important open debate on the situation in the Middle East.

Iraq fully appreciates the Council's united position in response to racist Israeli settlement-building policies. That position was reflected by the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), in which the international community condemned Israeli settlement-building and lent considerable support to the two-State solution, in line with 1967 borders. My delegation sincerely thanks the delegations of New Zealand, Malaysia, Venezuela and Senegal for pleading in favour of justice and international law by submitting the text on which the Council voted on 23 December 2016.

We also thank the United States for abstaining and not using its right to veto, illustrating the country's commitment to basic principles and its faith in the two-State solution, and for acknowledging that, in the eyes of the international community, the policy of illegal settlement construction hinders and undermines the international community's efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Palestinian cause.

The Palestinian people have the right to enjoy special international protection, in addition to the protection to which they are entitled, under the provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The Security Council should ensure that Israeli occupation forces do not violate those international rules and monitor the horrendous abuses perpetrated against civilians, end unprecedented violations committed against holy sites in Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque and protect the Palestinian people. It should also ensure the full withdrawal from occupied territory based on 1967 borders, in accordance with resolution 242 (1967) and resolution 338 (1973).

We condemn all acts of Israeli settlement-building as illegitimate and illegal. They are a major obstacle to the two-State solution and undermine peace efforts in the region. The Arab party, however, demonstrates a sincere willingness to end this protracted conflict and achieve just peace, which would have a positive impact on the management of natural resources, judicious and lasting economic governance and on the promotion of security in the Middle East.

We commend the efforts of some States members of the Council that seek to launch global peace efforts, in particular the recent efforts of France that culminated with the holding of the Paris Middle East Peace Conference. The outcome of that Conference reaffirmed the right of Palestinians to a sovereign State and the end of Israeli occupation that began in 1967, as well as the settlement of the issue, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions. We reassert that the Palestinian people have the right integrate into the international economy and to have full control over their territory, natural resources and revenue, which would allow them to have lasting and predictable income and improve their overall financial situation.

United Nations reports unequivocally confirm the adverse impact of the Israeli occupation, which can be seen in the rise in Palestinian production costs and the isolation of the Palestinian people who are now excluded from global value chains. In addition, the inhumane blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, the restrictions on the freedom of movement — a prerequisite for economic recovery — and the illegal confiscation of Palestinian land are all factors that exacerbate the plight of the Palestinian people, undermine the domestic economy and fuels people's anger and loss of trust in the international community, which still has not managed to secure a two-State solution.

We support our brothers in occupied Palestine territory and in the occupied Syrian Golan in their legitimate struggle, in accordance with international law, to establish an independent, viable Palestinian State that is geographically connected, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on 1967 borders. We call upon the international parties engaged in the peace talks to speed up efforts and overcome the difficulties that hinder efforts to achieve a two-State solution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Atlassi (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. I would also like to thank you for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, reaffirming your country's willingness to continue to lend support to the Palestinian question in the light of the status quo.

I would like to congratulate the newly elected members of the Council: Sweden, Bolivia, Italy, Ethiopia and Kazakhstan. I would also like to thank the Special Coordinator of the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Mladenov, for his valuable briefing on this issue.

We have bid farewell to 2016 — a year in which developments occurred quickly, especially in the Middle East. Those developments overshadowed the region's main cause, namely, the Palestinian question. It is a question that continues to linger in the background. It has worsened due to the stalemate in the negotiations in 2014, which led to the escalation and expansion of the policies of Judaization and settlement-building in occupied Palestinian territory since 4 June 1967.

There have been successive calls for the cessation of Israeli settlement-building in the occupied territories, as well as successive efforts through the Arab Ministerial Committee for the Arab Peace Initiative comprising of Morocco, Egypt, Jordan and Palestine to end to the Israeli occupation, international efforts and initiatives to save the two-State solution, and the international Quartet and its recommendations to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in accordance with international legitimacy. All these efforts have been aimed at salvaging the two-State solution, which is the only way to restore peace and security between the Israelis and Palestinians.

The adoption by the Security Council of resolution 2334 (2016), of 23 December, stresses the need to put an end to settlements as the main impediment to the two-State solution. Therefore, Morocco has consistently called for an end to be put to settlements and has reiterated that they undermine all efforts towards peace and that the only solution is the two-State one.

However, the road ahead is still long and arduous. As we have said in previous statements, the resolution of the situation in the Middle East is conditional on finding a solution to the Palestinian question, which is the central and pivotal question of the Middle East. This should be translated into a Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, otherwise, the situation will deteriorate.

The Kingdom of Morocco, led by his Majesty King Mohammed VI, heads the Jerusalem Committee. This is of great importance to Muslims, as this is the first of the two Meccas and the third sacred shrine. Anything other than the two-State solution will eventually cause more violence. The continued deterioration of the Palestinian situation due to Judaization, settlements and the displacement of peoples will eventually fuel additional violence. It has therefore become imperative for the international community to shoulder its responsibility to find a way out of the stalemate that has characterized the situation since the negotiations halted between the Palestinians and Israel, as this caused the situation to deteriorate even further and resulted in violence. However, negotiations should not be held just for negotiations' sake, but should aim to achieve the two-State solution, with East Jerusalem as the capital.

That is why Morocco has been keen to support all initiatives that aim to find a solution to the situation and to give impetus to the peace process in the Middle East, so as to make it possible to devise a settlement that will eventually enable the Palestinians to establish their own State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In this regard, Morocco has all along supported the French initiative and also participated in the Middle East Peace Conference, which was held in Paris two days ago, and we also welcome the joint declaration of the Conference.

Morocco firmly believes that the only way to resolve the Palestinian question is for both parties to go back to the negotiating table in good faith and to work within a very specific time frame, based on the principles of international legitimacy underlying the solution of two States coexisting peacefully, in harmony and with cooperation.

Morocco will sustain its principled position as regards the conflict, based on the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of creating an independent State of Palestine. Morocco has always been and remains ready to engage actively and effectively in any and all initiatives aimed at giving impetus to the peace process, in order to reach a settlement that will eventually create security, stability and peace in the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Ms. Sughayar (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): We congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Mladenov, for his comprehensive briefing.

This discussion comes at a critical point in time, not just because it coincides with recent developments, which have included many actions on the Palestinian political track, but also because it touches on important issues in the Middle East since the appointment of the new Secretary-General. We hope that the new Secretary-General will directly and effectively exert influence to bring about stability and security in the region. The Middle East region requires sincere, major efforts in order to achieve unity and peace, efforts that address the root causes of the conflict.

The resolution of the Palestinian — Israeli conflict requires reasonable and wise decisions that do not repeat the mistakes of the past and that end the policies of tyranny and deprivation of rights. This has only brought more tension, extremism and violence to the region. The efforts made recently at all levels to break the stalemate in the conflict have had increasing political significance given the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) and the Paris Conference held two days ago.

Jordan welcomes the adoption of this resolution and the French initiative. In this regard, we call on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities; enhance the momentum achieved; and implement the resolution in full and use it in the context of innovative initiatives that would lead to a two-State solution being realized and to a comprehensive settlement in terms of final status.

The adoption of resolution 2354 (2015) and its condemnation of Israeli settlement plans in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly East Jerusalem, reflects the reaction of the international community to settlement activity, in particular in view of the unprecedented increase in settlements and in the number of settlers on occupied Palestinian territory. It asserted the important principle that the Security Council would not acknowledge any changes to the 1967 borders, that settlements are illegal, and that Israel should be compelled to adhere to its obligations under international law and needs to put an end to all illegal settlements on Palestinian territory.

We have repeatedly condemned Israel's illegal practices and its unilateral actions, as an occupying Power, against the Palestinian people as well as the policy of imposing a new reality on the ground, including the demolition of homes, the confiscation of land and the displacement of civilians. Peace cannot be imposed or even achieved unless the two parties take bold action that end the tension and violence and build confidence. Statements by Israel that it is committed to the two-State solution and is ready to negotiate directly with the Palestinians will not have any significance unless they are coupled with concrete action on the ground based on international resolutions.

We reaffirm our principled position that the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will happen only when the occupation ends and an independent and viable Palestinian State is established that is based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on international terms of reference that include the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant United Nations resolutions. We reaffirm that we will continue to defend Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem and to protect them. This is based on the custodianship of the Hashemite Kingdom over Islamic and Christian holy sites. That is the mandate of Abdullah II, King of Jordan.

We support any serious initiatives aimed at promoting the peace process through serious negotiations and also supported the Paris Conference, which reflected the true will of the international community towards a solution to the conflict. We reaffirm that negotiations aimed at a two-State solution need to take place within a specific time frame. Despite the fact that such efforts will not lead to an immediate end to the conflict, it is, however, a chance to end the long stalemate in the peace process and create momentum to end the political vacuum, which will, sooner or later, lead to a more severe conflict between the two parties and in the region as a whole.

Israel must objectively and positively look at recent developments. Its continued intransigence with regard to and rejection of developments and settlement activities is a threat to the two-State solution and its own security. Those international efforts are not directed against Israel but aimed at achieving the two-State solution in accordance with international law. Success in reaching an agreement would actually achieve the aspirations of the Palestinian people and security for Israel.

The Palestinian question is the primary concern of the countries of the region and many others throughout the world. Failure to reach a just and comprehensive settlement of the issue would lead to an increase in extremism, violence and terrorism in the region. The region cannot sustain any more tension and violence. The continued lack of stability would lead to the targeting of many parts of the international community, helping the terrorist groups to become the biggest winner.

Jordan reaffirms that, now more than ever, serious cooperation and willingness at the international and regional levels to combat terrorism must receive the utmost priority. We therefore need to respond to threats that affect stability and undermine security in the region, in particular, and international peace and security in general. We need to support such a response so that we can confront the terrorist groups that have exploited the instability and political vacuum in the region to expand their power. Those terrorist groups are responsible for the fear not only of only individuals but of entire communities because of their bloody tactics and horrible crimes, which have claimed the lives of countless civilians.

Turning to Syria, since the beginning of the crisis we have maintained a principled position aimed at ending the violence and reaching a Syrian-led political process, led with a unified international vision for its guiding principle based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and the recommendations of the International Syrian Support Group that would ensure Syria's unity and territorial integrity and support the pluralistic nature of the State of Syria.

We support all sincere efforts to end the crisis in Syria. We encourage the parties in Syria to build confidence so as to reach a comprehensive political solution. The current phase calls for concerted efforts to help the Syrian people overcome the crisis. Jordan is pleased to note the Turkish-Russian agreement for restoring calm in Syria and other positive developments that have led to concrete results with regard to the safe evacuation of Syrian civilians from Aleppo. We look forward to the political discussion to take place in Astana. We hope that they will foster an environment conducive to the resumption of the United Nations-sponsored Geneva discussions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Vieira (Brazil): I would like to begin my statement on behalf of Brazil by thanking the Government of Sweden for organizing this debate and welcoming the newly elected non-permanent members of the Security Council: Bolivia, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Italy and Sweden.

The various conflicts in the Middle East are a matter of grave concern for the international community, particularly the United Nations, but more so for the inhabitants of that region — the first victims of what looks like an endless cycle of violence. Brazil, as well as the international community in its overwhelming majority, supports a negotiated settlement to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians — one that meets Israel's security needs and the Palestinian right to statehood and sovereignty, as Brazil has constantly advocated, and one that fully takes into account resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), among others. We have repeatedly appealed to both sides to refrain from acts of violence that may push the parties further away from the negotiating table and the two-State solution that we all envision. We firmly repudiate all terrorist activities, regardless of their motivation. As Secretary-General António Guterres has stated, such acts should not be allowed to deter the parties from the need for a renewed commitment to dialogue.

Brazil appreciatively takes note of and welcomes Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), which condemns all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror as well as all acts of provocation, incitement and destruction, and reaffirms that Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory are illegal under international law and an obstacle for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. It comes as an important addition to a stock of Security Council resolutions: resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 478 (1980), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003), and 1850 (2008), which represent an instrument that the international community uses to point the parties in the direction of peace. We expect that that initiative and the Paris Peace Conference held last weekend will motivate further multilateral efforts favouring the return to meaningful negotiations between the parties, thereby leading to the establishment of two States, Israel and Palestine, living peacefully side-by-side with internationally recognized borders.

The recently announced nationwide ceasefire in Syria, brokered by Turkey and the Russian Federation and supported by resolution 2236 (2016), represents a much-needed measure of hope in the efforts to reach a political solution to the conflict. We welcome those developments. Brazil urges all parties to respect the ceasefire and engage constructively in the negotiations to take place in Astana and Geneva, based on the road map established by resolution 2254 (2015), allowing for an inclusive and Syrian-led political process.

Last month, Brazil supported two important decisions of the General Assembly concerning Syria. Resolution 71/130 demanded an immediate end to attacks on civilians throughout the country, while resolution 71/248 established the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. Those initiatives confirmed that the Assembly can have a relevant role in seeking peace and accountability for Syria without prejudice to the responsibilities of the Security Council.

Brazil welcomed the resolution of the political impasse in Lebanon with the election of President Michel Aoun and the formation of a Government of National Accord under Prime Minister Saad Hariri. We congratulate the new Lebanese leadership and reiterate our long-term commitment to the development and stability of Lebanon, including through our participation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Brazil underlines that the strategic review of UNIFIL currently being undertaken by the Secretariat, as called for in resolution 2305 (2016), must take into consideration the strategic, operative and financial needs of the mission, as well as its highly volatile security environment.

With regard to Iraq, we are concerned by the humanitarian impact of the ongoing military operations in Mosul. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that approximately 140,000 people have been displaced by hostilities in and around the city — a figure that continues to rise. Food and water shortages are affecting the civilians of Mosul, who are already being subjected to a harsh winter. In Mosul and elsewhere in Iraq, we strongly condemn tactics attributed to the what is known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) that may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity, including forced displacements, attacks against humanitarian workers and the use of civilians as human shields. We highlight the need to plan long-term stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Mosul. Another priority should be the long-term reconciliation of all ethnic and religious communities coexisting in the areas once occupied by ISIL. Women, girls, minorities and other vulnerable populations deserve particular attention in that regard.

Lastly, on Yemen, we regret the absence of a durable cessation of hostilities as well as the parties' unwillingness to accept the road map for negotiations proposed by Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, whose work we support.

In conclusion, Brazil urges all Yemeni actors and their external supporters to renew efforts towards a negotiated solution and to avoid unilateral measures that might jeopardize this process.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Estreme (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Swedish delegation for organizing this open debate.

Argentina has always supported conflict resolution through dialogue and diplomacy; respect for international law and the sovereignty, independence, national unity and territorial integrity of States; the rejection of the acquisition of territory by force, and confidence in the constructive role and persuasive power of the international community to open paths for dialogue and to advance the negotiations. That is why my country strongly supports all efforts to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East, whether in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or in connection with the situations in Syria, Yemen, Libya and Iraq.

With regard to the conflict between Israel and Palestine, and in the light of the fact that half a century has passed since the adoption of the historic resolution 242 (1967) and the beginning of the occupation of the Palestinian territories, we reaffirm our support for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace on the basis of the two-State solution. Argentina participated last Sunday in the Paris Middle East Peace Conference and firmly supports the aspiration of its joint declaration that a State of Israel and a State of Palestine must coexist side by side in peace and security, on the basis of the 1967 borders and whatever the parties determine during the negotiation process. We thank the Government of France for this initiative.

Argentina recognizes the right of the State of Israel to live in peace with its neighbours, within secure and internationally recognized borders, as well as the right of the Palestinian people to form an independent and viable State that is recognized by all nations.

My country reiterates its concern about the persistent and continuing growth of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and calls for an end to their expansion, as set out in resolution 2334 (2016) adopted on 23 December. The settlements are an obstacle to peace and weaken the prospect for a two-State solution, thereby promoting the perpetuation of an unsustainable status quo.

At the same time, Palestinian leaders must sincerely address Israeli security concerns. Hamas and other Palestinian groups must put an end to incitement and attacks on Israeli civilians, as set forth in resolution 2334 (2016). The launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip against Israel must cease immediately. My country strongly condemns all terrorist acts and is convinced that there is no military solution to this conflict, nor can a solution be imposed through terrorist methods.

Argentina reaffirms the special status of Jerusalem, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, and rejects any unilateral measure aimed at changing it. My country believes that the holy city should be a place of convergence and peace and that the three great monotheistic religions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam — should be guaranteed free access to the holy places.

With regard to the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, Argentina continues to be deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in that country and condemns all acts of violence, including attacks on civilians. My country is eager to see the recent initiatives to stop the violence in Syria and launch a political process give way to a new phase that will end years of conflict and disunity. In that regard, we welcome the ceasefire and the adoption of resolution 2336 (2016), which we hope will be implemented in good faith by all parties, as well as resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016).

Over the past five years, Argentina has affirmed in all discussions on Syria that the solution to the conflict can only be a political one and not military, much less a terrorist one, as has been acknowledged in resolution 2254 (2015). That is why, just one week before the meeting of the representative of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic with the representatives of the opposition to be held in Astana, we hope that the agreements reached there will contribute to the success of the official negotiations to be held in the framework of the Geneva process, under the auspices of the United Nations, next month. We hope that all countries with influence over the parties will continue to act in concert to achieve an early ceasefire, ensure access to humanitarian assistance and continue the political process in accordance with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Peace in the Middle East is only possible through dialogue and negotiation that respect the parameters recognized by the international community, namely, the two-State solution, based on relevant United Nations resolutions, agreements signed between the parties, the road map of the Quartet, the Arab Peace Initiative, a mutually acceptable solution to the situation of Jerusalem and a fair resolution of the refugee issue.

In order to respond to the call of Secretary-General António Guterres to make 2017 into a year for peace, the international community should spare no effort to put an end to the various conflicts in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Madrakhimov (Uzbekistan): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in my capacity as chair of the OIC group. I would ask you, Sir, to accept my warmest congratulations on Sweden's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I wish you every success. I also wish to congratulate the other newly elected members of the Council — Bolivia, Ethiopia, Italy and Kazakhstan — on the assumption of their responsibilities.

At the outset, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation welcomes the recent adoption by this organ of resolution 2334 (2016), which, among several important elements, reaffirmed that the establishment by Israel, the occupying Power, of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law, and reiterated the Council's demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and fully respect all its legal obligations in this regard.

The international consensus in this regard and the urgency of justly and peacefully resolving the question of Palestine, the core of Arab-Israeli conflict, have been made abundantly clear by this important action of the Council. We urge the Security Council to accept serious follow-up efforts to compel compliance with and ensure the implementation of the resolution towards providing tangible political support for international efforts aimed at ending the Israeli occupation and achieving a two-State solution on the basis of pre-1967 borders and promoting, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions and the moderate principles of the Arab Peace Initiative, the realization of a just, lasting and peaceful solution to which OIC remains unflinchingly committed.

Significantly, this meeting assumes special importance as it comes two days after convening the Paris Middle East Peace Conference. Such a historic timely meeting highlights the will and commitment of the international community to continue its pursuit to salvage the two-State solution before it is too late and reach a just, lasting and comprehensive peace without delay.

This meeting takes place overshadowed by an extremely volatile and continually deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, owing to Israel's prolonged occupation and illegal policies and measures, including, inter alia, systematic human rights violations against the Palestinian civilian population; gross collective punishment perpetrated against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip under the decade-long Israeli siege and blockade; continuing house demolitions; the arrest and administrative detention of Palestinian civilians, including political and human right activists; settlement and wall construction; and the expansion and isolation of Jerusalem from its natural Palestinian environs.

The recent attempts by the Israeli Government with regard to a bill aimed at further entrenching its illegal settlement outposts is not only undermining the credibility and significance of political efforts and damaging the viability and territorial contiguity and integrity of the State of Palestine; it also goes against international law and United Nations resolutions. All of such illegal measures must be ceased and the occupying Power must abide by its legal obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, as stipulated in resolution 2334 (2016). The OIC remains firm in its conviction that the Security Council must act to ensure the halt of all Israeli illegal acts, provide protection and justice for the Palestinian people and compell Israel, the occupying Power, to strictly abide by its obligations under international law and comply with the countless resolutions of the Security Council and General Assembly.

Once again, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation must draw attention to its great concerns regarding the ongoing Israeli violations against holy places, particularly the al-Aqsa Mosque, which are not only violations against religious rights of Muslims, but are also threatening to ignite religious conflict. We forewarn about the recent decision of the Israeli Government banning the call for prayer in mosques in the occupied city of Al-Quds and its suburbs, given that the decision constitutes a grave violation of the freedom to worship and threatens to destabilize the situation on the ground. Such provocations and incitement must be brought to an end. The OIC views with concern the unprecedented levels of assaults by extremist Israeli settling groups against civilians in the city of Al-Khalil/Hebron, including the recent harassment and threats against human rights activists, including human rights defenders who had documented on video the crimes of an Israeli soldier shooting an injured, unarmed Palestinian.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the OIC's support and solidarity and readiness to engage with relevant international efforts in order to enable the Palestinian people to regain their inalienable national rights, including the right to return, self-determination and realize the independence and sovereignty of the State of Palestine on the land occupied by Israel since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We must reach a just solution to the question of Palestinian refugees according to the relevent resolutions of the United Nations and establish lasting peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Maldives.

Mr. Sareer (Maldives): I would like to thank the Swedish presidency of the Security Council for convening this quarterly open debate on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

We are starting the dialogue on this topic this year at an important juncture — following the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), the first Security Council resolution on the Palestinian issue in almost a decade. The Maldives welcomes the resolution, which reaffirms the illegality of Israeli settlements in the occupied territory of Palestine and calls upon States to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. We believe that this is a significant step forward in the Security Council that demonstrates the international political support in addressing the predicament of the Palestinian people, which has stretched on for far too long. It is a clear message to the Israeli Government that its policies and laws aimed at perpetuating and further extending its illegal occupation in blatant violation of international law will not be accepted by the Council or the rest of the world.

With deep concern, we take note of the punitive actions that the Israeli Government has taken against the Security Council members that voted in favour of the resolution, as well as the harsh political statements issued from the highest level expressing the lack of intent to implement the resolution. This flagrant disregard for the very basic principles of international law sets a dangerous precedent, for which the Israeli Government should be held accountable. We believe it is critical to build on the momentum generated by the resolution and take further concrete measures to bring an end to the Israeli occupation and find a peaceful and sustainable resolution to this conflict, which has continuously overshadowed peace and security in the region.

The Maldives also welcomes resolutions 2328 (2016), 2332 (2016) and 2336 (2016), which address the escalating humanitarian crisis in Syria. Given the appalling number of innocent lives that have already been claimed by that conflict, we believe it is crucial to ensure that unobstructed humanitarian aid is continuously accessible to those in need in order to prevent further casualties. We also welcome the efforts of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey aimed at initiating the political process to end the violence in Syria, and call upon all the relevant parties to enhance and expedite those efforts.

The crisis in Syria is indeed the one of the gravest tragedies of our time. The Maldives, along with other Member States, remains committed to taking action to resolve the crisis and rebuild that war-torn country. We cannot falter in our duties as Member States in times of dire need.

All decisions of the Security Council should be followed by urgent action. The lack of progress in implementing the resolutions of the Council on issues relating to the Middle East must be addressed in a concrete manner in order to maintain the credibility of not only the Council, but the United Nations as a whole. We welcome the initiatives by Member States, that help supplement the implementation of those resolutions, including the Paris Middle East Peace Conference, which was held on 15 January.

The Maldives would like to reiterate its call for a two-State solution that recognizes the sovereign and independent State of Palestine, based on the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. The achievement of sustainable peace in the Middle East can be possible only through political will, international cooperation and tangible actions. The resolution of those conflicts is necessary in order to resolve other threats to international peace and security, such as terrorism and violent extremism. Collectively, we need stronger resolve in order to secure a better, more peaceful future for those countries and maintain international peace and order.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Im In Ryong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate.

Let me begin by welcoming the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) on 23 December 2016, which clearly condemns illegal Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

The resolution of the Middle East question is today one of the top priorities for sustaining peace and security in the world. Almost 70 years have passed since the international community started its endeavour to settle the Palestinian and Middle East issues, which started with Israel's occupation of Arab territories in 1948. Nevertheless, no significant progress has been made yet. This is entirely due to the Israel's anti-peaceful stand and the prejudicial Middle East policies of certain forces.

Israel has ignored the just and fair demands of the international community and it is continuing to cling to the aggressive and inhumane policies of illegally occupying Arab territories, expanding settlements, blockading the Gaza Strip, ruthlessly killing civilians and so forth. This reality is negatively affecting the peace and security process in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the Security Council, whose main responsibility is to safeguard international peace and security, has turned its face away from Israeli atrocities without taking any appropriate measures, thereby bringing about serious damage to the credibility of the Security Council. This is because the Security Council played into the hands of the double standard of the United States, taking Israel's side in the matter.

Such double standards are extremely visible with respect to the Korean peninsula, and the Security Council sanctions resolutions against my country, fabricated by the United States, provide a typical example of that. The United States persists in its desperate attempts to deprive the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of its independence and its legitimate and justifiable right to defence. Obsessed with its ill-intended, inveterate antipathy towards the independence of other countries, the United States also fabricated a sanctions resolution against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea using the Security Council, in wanton violation of international justice and the principle of impartiality, and has pressured other countries to implement such resolutions.

The main reason that the Middle East has fallen into a chaos characterized by terrorism, destruction and the refugee crisis is the high-handedness, arbitrariness, military aggression and interference in other countries' internal affairs by the United States. The United States, which tolerates the Israeli expansionist policies and nuclear capability, is the principle offender destroying world peace.

All facts demonstrate that the Security Council, which is mandated to ensure peace and security in the world, should pay greater attention to today's changing reality and undertake much stronger measures to reach a fair solution to the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The establishment of an independent State of Palestine is an inalienable and sovereign right of the Palestinian people. The support of the just struggle of Palestinians for an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital and on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, is a trend that no one can stop. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea strongly condemns Israel for its illegal settlement expansion and demands that it stop undermining peace and security in the region, and that it withdraw its forces from illegally occupied Arab and Palestinian territories without preconditions.

I take this opportunity to clarify once again the principled position of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea: all disputes should be settled peacefully through dialogue and negotiation between the parties concerned without any interference from outside forces. In that connection, my delegation is of the view that the Syrian issue should also be resolved peacefully through dialogue, without foreign intervention, in accordance with the Charter's principle of respect for sovereignty and non-interference.

In conclusion, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue to stand firmly with the Palestinian and Arab peoples in their just struggle for peace and stability.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure to speak on behalf of the Group of Arab States. I would like to congratulate the friendly country of Sweden on its accession to the Security Council and on assuming the presidency for the month of January. I fully trust that Sweden, given its principled positions on international matters and its remarkable record at the service of international peace and security, will play in an effective role not only this month but throughout its mandate in the Security Council.

I also wish to congratulate the delegations of Ethiopia, Bolivia, Kazakhstan and Italy on their elections as members of the Security Council. Furthermore, I wish to praise Angola, Venezuela, Malaysia, New Zealand and Spain for their distinguished service during their mandates as members of the Security Council.

The Arab Group is pleased by the remarkable action that the Security Council has taken in adopting resolution 2334 (2016). That resolution condemns Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The resolution also calls on all States concerned to distinguish between Israel and the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, with particular regard to agricultural and industrial production. It recognizes the need to not allow Israel, the occupying Power, to exhaust the natural resources of the Palestinian territories, or to create obstacles on the road to a peaceful, fair solution that would put an end to the Israeli occupation and enable the independence of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital on contiguous Palestinian territory — which has been occupied since 1967 — and lead to the development of an equitable solution for the Palestinian refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

We encourage the Council to move on from the adoption of resolutions to taking practical steps to implement the aforementioned resolutions. That is a major responsibility of the Council in its new composition, in accordance with the agreed international references, in particular the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the Madrid Conference, including the principle of land for peace, the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principles set forth by the Secretary of State of the United States on 28 December 2016. We also subscribe to the statement adopted by the Paris Middle East Peace Conference.

The Council must continue to push towards an internationally recognized political solution. The Council must not remain unmoved in the face of Israeli intransigence and violations. We must not lose sight of a very clear reality, namely, that peace in the Middle East and in the entire world cannot accommodate the persistent occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories. Peace cannot be achieved in the absence of a fully independent and sovereign Palestinian State. International cooperation and the fight against terrorism and violent extremism must be based on mutual respect. We also reaffirm the fact that the complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories, the occupied Syrian Golan and usurped Lebanese territory must take place and must include the lifting of the blockade on the Gaza Strip.

I shall continue now in my national capacity.

Saudi Arabia intends to participate actively in all international efforts to reach peace and stability in the kindred country of Syria. In that connection, we welcome the adoption of resolution 2336 (2016), adopted on 31 December 2016, which affirms the need for real peaceful political transition in Syria in accordance with the Geneva communiqué of June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex), as well as the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, in particular resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016).

Saudi Arabia also reaffirms the importance of General Assembly resolution 71/203 of 19 December 2016 on the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as General Assembly resolution 71/248 of 21 December 2016 on the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. We call for the implementation of those two resolutions and of all international decisions regarding Syria, particularly those relating to facilitating access to humanitarian aid for all who need it, without preconditions, while lifting the blockade and ending the attempts of the Syrian authorities to defame their own people.

Saudi Arabia believes that the Syrian people is not about to end its struggle for liberty and dignity, and that the oppression by the Syrian regime, conducted with the support of its Russian and Iranian allies, the terrorists of Hizbullah and other armed militias, such as the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, must end. The Syrian people must be allowed to determine their political future as they see fit and in full independence.

The President: The representative of Israel has asked to make a further statement. I now give her the floor.

Ms. Meitzad (Israel): The Islamic State of Iran, which openly supports and sponsors terrorism throughout the region, had the audacity to sit here in the Chamber and spread lies. Besides its perpetration of the long list of criminal and terrorist acts attributed to it, Iran does not spare the lives even of its own young people, since it remains one of the few States in the world that execute juvenile offenders. Considering Iran's utter disregard for human life, it comes as no surprise that it continues to commit unspeakable acts such as assisting the Al-Assad regime in the ruthless slaughter of the Syrian people, directly and through its proxy Hizbullah.

I could not agree more with the Ambassador of Lebanon's statement about how impossible it is to maintain peace and security if States are not held responsible for their internationally wrongful acts. I believe that, in his case, self-awareness is operating, coming as it does from a representative of a State in which Hizbullah, which has been designated a terrorist organization, has the honour of being represented in Parliament and the Government.

I now turn to the comments by my colleague from Bolivia. Bolivia's one-sided, biased and unrelenting attack on Israel is an example of what makes the Security Council incapable of being more effective. One might expect that a country that had just joined the Security Council would appreciate the responsibilities that such a task entails and would make an effort to try to understand the complexities of a situation. But for Bolivia, as for one of its immediate predecessors on the Council, Venezuela, a seat on the Council is to be used to brutally attack my country, and thereby severely damage the credibility of this institution.

The meeting rose at 3.10 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7864

Provisional

Security Council

Seventy-second year

7864th meeting

Wednesday, 18 January 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Skoog	(Sweden)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Coleman
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in Mali

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2016/1137)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Expression of sympathy in connection with the terrorist attack in Gao, Mali

The President: I want to begin by acknowledging the heinous attack on the Operational Coordination Mechanism in Gao, Mali. I express the Council's deepest condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims, the Government of Mali and the signatory parties of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, and wish a rapid and full recovery to the injured. In view of the agenda for today's meeting, I am certain that the Council will revert to the issue.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Mali

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2016/1137)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Mali to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Diop, Minister for Foreign Affairs, African Integration and International Cooperation of the Republic of Mali.

Also in accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, and considering Algeria's role as Chair of the Comité de suivi de l'accord, I invite the representative of Algeria to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Mr. Sabri Boukadoum, Permanent Representative of Algeria.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/1137, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ladsous.

Mr. Ladsous (*spoke in French*): I am grateful for this opportunity to present the latest report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2016/1137) to the members of the Security Council, and to review with them the most recent developments in the country.

I welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs, African Integration and International Cooperation of the Republic of Mali, Mr. Abdoulaye Diop, and thank him for the Government of Mali's ongoing support for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). I also welcome the representative of Algeria, a leader in international mediation, for his tireless commitment to the promotion of the peace process in Mali.

Before beginning my briefing, I would like to pay tribute to the victims of the dreadful suicide attack on the Operational Coordination Mechanism camp in Gao. We offer our condolences to the families of the victims, to the Government of Mali and to the parties to the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. As the Secretary-General notes in his report, the perpetrators of the heinous attack must be identified and brought to justice as soon as possible.

We are trying to better understand the situation. What we do know is that a car bomb exploded at around 9 a.m. inside the Operational Coordination Mechanism camp, where close to 600 troops of the Platform coalition of armed groups, the Mechanism and the Malian armed forces had been stationed for the past three weeks in preparation for joint patrols. The explosion caused heavy casualties. An initial assessment puts the death toll at over 60, with several dozen wounded — some critically so. MINUSMA, Operation Barkhane and the Malian armed forces are currently working as hard as possible to assist the victims and secure the town of Gao.

We condemn with the utmost firmness this cowardly and ignoble attack, which constitutes a direct attack on the peace process. It was clearly aimed at derailing the peace process by undermining trust between the signatory parties and the people, as well as at countering the recent progress in the implementation of the security arrangements of the peace Agreement. This incident highlights once again the fact that an acceleration in the implementation of the Agreement is the only possible way to stabilize Mali and to bring the peace process to fruition. I reiterate that time is against us, and the United Nations remains more than ever deeply committed to supporting the Government of Mali and the signatory parties in the speediest possible implementation of the Agreement.

We have reached a pivotal moment. I recall that the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali was signed more than 18 months ago, while the interim period was intended to last 24 months. In other words, more than 18 months have passed yet, despite some advances, too little progress has been recorded. It must be said that since the last Council meeting on Mali (see S/PV.7801), the implementation of interim institutional and security arrangements has basically stagnated and remains undermined by persistent disagreements and a lack of trust among the signatory parties. We note the recent heightened fragmentation of armed groups, particularly within the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad, and the repeated attempts of dissident groups to disrupt the peace process, all of hampers the implementation of the Agreement. I must stress that only five months remain until the end of the interim period. The absence of tangible results is of major concern and leads me to question the real will and commitment of the signatories of the peace process.

As I have said, there has been some progress. For instance, following the ministerial meeting on the peace Agreement held in the margins of the General Assembly in New York in September, armed groups finally submitted, after a year's delay, the lists containing their candidates for the Operational Coordination Mechanism, the interim authorities, the Commission on Integration and the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission. Since then, however, every attempt to implement joint patrols has failed, mainly because of disputes among the signatory parties on logistical and financial issues. As a result, we have made insufficient progress. It was only after intense negotiations and thanks to the good offices of MINUSMA, international mediation and the High Representative of the President of the Republic of Mali for the implementation of the peace Agreement that the armed forces of Mali and the armed groups are now regrouped at Gao for the launch of the long-awaited mixed patrols. Clearly, we must wait and see what consequences this morning's tragedy may have.

Similarly, the rivalry among armed groups over the presidency of the interim authorities in Kidal has so far prevented their establishment. I was in Kidal in May last year, where I met with the Governor-designate, who told me that he would assume his functions within a week. That was in May, while it is now January of the following year. All this endless delay is deeply regrettable and hinders the cantonment, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. All eight cantonment sites that have been built and equipped with the support of MINUSMA have been fully operational but remained essential empty since October. Some institutional and political reforms are required but have yet to be transformed into action. The definition of criteria for the integration of ex-combatants, security sector reform and the redeployment strategy of the Malian defence and security forces has yet to be finalized by the Government. Similarly, an inclusive and long-term dialogue on the restoration of State authority and institutional reforms is necessary if these reforms are to bring real change.

One of the pillars of the MINUSMA mandate, a cornerstone of resolution 2295 (2016), is the restoration and extension of State authority across all Mali. In this regard, the Mission supported the Government in the preparation of the local elections of 20 November. These were the first elections held since 2009, and unfolded in 92 per cent of the municipalities of Mali. Unfortunately, they did not take place in the Kidal, Ménaka and Taoudenni regions, or in certain localities of Gao, Mopti and Timbuktu, due to security incidents and impediments to voting. On the eve of the elections, armed groups and opposition parties repeatedly expressed their objections to the organization of elections, which they believed should take place only after the establishment of the interim authorities.

Let us not forget, however, that 2017 is to be an important year for regional elections and a constitutional referendum in Mali. All stakeholders must therefore strive to find common ground, and we count on the Government to ensure that these elections are held in an open and inclusive environment that will contribute to reconciliation. One key point that must be stressed is the election of many women, who now represent nearly 30 per cent of elected municipal councilors in Timbuktu, Gao and Bamako.

The announcement by President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in September 2016 of the convening of a national reconciliation conference — now scheduled for March under the auspices of the Minister for Foreign Affairs — could offer a genuinely inclusive forum to address all the root causes of the crisis and involve all components of Malian society in order to map a path towards national reconciliation. I welcome the appointment of the Ombudsman of Mali, Mr. Baba Hakim Haïdara, to lead the preparatory committee, and hope that this important conference can be held by the deadline that has been set.

However, this morning's tragedy demonstrates the extent to which the terrorist phenomenon is becoming more and more disturbing in northern and central Mali, as well as in the subregion. While the number of attacks on the Malian armed forces, MINUSMA and international forces has declined over the past three months, their level of sophistication remains a cause for growing concern. Complex attacks on our air capacities have grounded some of our helicopters and impeded their operational capability. We need to consider this situation in depth, because if the security situation continues to deteriorate at the current pace there will soon be no peace to maintain in Mali. We must condemn such attacks and be aware of their regional dimensions, including recent lethal attacks on security forces in the Niger and Burkina Faso close to the Malian border. All of this highlights the imperative role of the regional partners in the peace process and in the work of MINUSMA. As called for in the resolution, we continue to work to strengthen links with the member countries of the Group of Five for the Sahel.

The Council also called on us to adopt a more robust and proactive stance to protect civilians suffering from the deteriorating security situation. However, the only viable solution to that problem is the redeployment of the Malian defence and security forces to the north and the centre of the country. A frank and constructive dialogue must then begin on the impact of drug trafficking and other transnational crimes on security and the peace process.

In spite of the sustained efforts, we still face significant capacity gaps — including helicopters and other aircraft, armoured vehicles, logistical support and protective gear — that hinder our ability to implement our mandate. We are in constant contact with troop- and police-contributing countries, which we thank for the capacities they provide. I think that, more than evert, a determined, additional effort is needed to close the gaps.

It is of paramount importance to restore the confidence of the Malian population. The window of opportunity to generate tangible peace dividends on the ground is closing. We continue to receive reports of serious violations of human rights by armed groups, and sometimes by State actors. The Government has in the past done little to combat impunity. Above all for people in the north of Mali, things are slow to change. A lack of basic social services along with food insecurity and chronic poverty all contribute to hindering trust from taking hold and becoming entrenched. The implementation of the development strategy for the north has not yet begun, more than a year after the international conference for the economic recovery and development of Mali. It is imperative that armed groups put an end to their obstruction of humanitarian access, while the Government and its partners must work more closely together to create the conditions for sustainable prosperity and growth in order remedy a situation in which millions of young Malians are still living under very precarious conditions.

The Government of Mali, with the support of MINUSMA, has developed indicators of progress that have been annexed to the Secretary-General's report. They will serve as a working and dialogue tool for a more systematic assessment of the progress made by the parties in Mali in the implementation of the peace Agreement. However, the indicators must be met, that is, they must help to address all the shortcomings I mentioned. I would call on the members of the international mediation to redouble their efforts to re-energize the Agreement's follow-up mechanisms.

On the margins of the fourth high-level seminar on peace and security, held in Oran in December with the African Union and Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra, we discussed the need for a high-level meeting of the international mediation, which I think should be held as soon as possible. We must also continue to focus on establishing a common vision of how to deal with dissident groups. I believe that the members of the Security Council must not forget that they have the option of imposing targeted measures against all those who violate the ceasefire and deliberately hamper the peace process.

Please forgive me for going on at such length. I regret that, unfortunately, the circumstances have impacted the tone and tenor of my briefing. I really wanted to convey to the Council a sense of urgency about the worrying state of the peace process in Mali. But it nevertheless remains the only possible avenue for achieving peace and reconciliation. Everyone must be fully committed to the implementation of the peace Agreement. There is not much time left.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Ladsous for his briefing.

(*spoke in English*)

The representative of Uruguay has asked for the floor to make a statement.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Uruguay believes that, as an elected member of the Security Council, it is part of its duty to share with the overall membership its views on the various items considered by the Council.

I thank Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his comprehensive briefing today, which was generally in line with various views of my delegation.

We regret to note that the situation in Mali continues to deteriorate more and more. We resolutely condemn the cowardly suicide attack today that left a toll of dozens of killed or injured.

I find it pertinent to focus on setting out our positions on some practical aspects as to what we should do.

First of all, Uruguay wishes to reiterate the crucial importance of implementing the peace Agreement in order to arrive at a lasting political solution to the conflict and achieve peace and stability in Mali, for ultimately political primacy falls to the national authorities. The United Nations and other international bodies can only support and facilitate the national commitment to peace. The main task in any undertaking for peace is to provide support to national stakeholders in order to restore peace. However, in no circumstance can that support take on the responsibilities that fall on countries as sovereign States.

It is imperative that the parties to the Agreement for peace and reconciliation in Mali be urged to honour their political commitments. It is necessary that there be willingness among the signatory parties to abide by the Agreement' provisions and meet the timelines that have been established. Until what was agreed between the Government, the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and the Platform is fully implemented, it will be impossible to move forward in any other area that could yield peace dividends for Mali's population.

Uruguay joins the Secretary-General in congratulating the Government of Mali on having held the first local elections since 2009, while also not overlooking the difficulties encountered in some regions where the process could not be completed. We are aware that there are challenges and that regional elections and the constitutional referendum are approaching. It will be important that the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the international community provide the necessary support to the Government of Mali so that those polls can take place successfully.

Secondly, also in line with the previous point, the security situation will improve only when progress is made with regard to the extension of State authority throughout the country's territory. All of us here have seen how the terrorism threat spreads and thrives in places where State authority is lax or non-existent. As long as the parties continue to face off and do not meet their commitments, terrorist groups will find a conducive space to continue to expand — at the cost of suffering for peacekeepers and Mali's armed forces, as well, even worse, at the cost of the lives of a large number of civilians.

Thirdly, we would like to refer to the possibility of taking coercive measures in the face of this reality. In resolution 2295 (2016) the Council expressed its readiness to consider imposing targeted sanctions against those who take steps to hinder or jeopardize the implementation of the Agreement, renew hostilities or violate the ceasefire, attack or make efforts to undermine MINUSMA and other international presences or support such attacks and actions. The Secretary-General himself has asked the Security Council to consider adopting such measures. In that regard, it will be up to the Council to evaluate the real impact of such measures on the ground as their eventual contribution to achieve the effective implementation of the peace Agreement.

In conclusion, Uruguay reiterates once again that the current mandate of MINUSMA exceeds what was envisaged for the running of a peacekeeping operation to include the carrying out of activities to fight terrorism. Uruguay voted in favour of resolution 2295 (2016) because it believed that Mali's security situation was extraordinary, but that this type of activity should not be replicated in future peacekeeping operations.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and African Integration of the Republic of Mali.

Mr. Diop (Mali) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin, Mr. President, by offering you my congratulations and those of the Malian delegation on the accession of your country, Sweden, to the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January 2017. The people and the Government of Mali greatly appreciate the contribution of Sweden to the stabilization efforts of my country. At the same time, I would like to express our great appreciation to the delegation of the Kingdom of Spain for the outstanding work it did during its presidency of the Council last month. Allow me also to thank the Secretary-General of our Organization, Mr. António Guterres, for his vision of the United Nations and for his renewed commitment to support the ongoing peace process in Mali, which is a guarantee of lasting stability in our region. I extend once again the best wishes of the President of the Republic of Mali, His Excellency Mr. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, to Mr. Guterres for success in his new role.

Before going further, I would also like to wish the new members of the Security Council every success and to assure them of the full cooperation of the Mali delegation here in New York. I would also like to welcome the presence here today of the Ambassador of Algeria, whose country, headed by His Excellency Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, played an extremely important role in restoring peace and stability in Mali, and I want to thank Algeria also for all the sacrifices it has made for peace in Mali and for stability in our region.

The peace process in Mali is difficult, complex and marked by many obstacles. This morning, the Malian people were once again torn apart by a suicide attack, as was mentioned earlier, against the cantonment site of the Operational Coordination Mechanism in Gao, which is one of the mechanisms provided for in the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, an outcome of the Algiers process. Unfortunately, the attack caused dozens of deaths, more than 60 wounded and significant material damage. As we wait to know the exact circumstances of this criminal, cowardly and barbaric attack on elements of the Malian armed forces, elements of the Platform coalition of armed groups as well as elements of the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad, grouped together for the launch of mixed patrols, the Government of Mali immediately and firmly condemned the attack and expressed its deep condolences to the bereaved families and wished a quick recovery to all the wounded. The Government also delared three days of national mourning. The perpetrators and accomplices of this criminal attack will be prosecuted and brought to justice. This point was made earlier by Under-Secretary-General Hervé Ladsous. It is very clearly an attack whose sole objective is to undermine peace, focusing as it did on stakeholders in this same peace.

I believe that it is in these most difficult of times that Malians, be they from the north, the south, the east or the west of the country, come together in their mourning and renew their determination to continue defending and promoting peace wherever it is necessary. This attack must therefore not distract us from our desire to move forward, promote peace and refute the will of those who only want to sabotage the peace process. I wish to repeat it once again: the Government of Mali remains committed to implementing the peace Agreement and to fulfilling all its commitments, because this Agreement, as it was again brought to our attention this morning, is the only framework today that allows us to bring peace and stability back to our country.

The delegation of Mali takes note of the report (S/2016/1137) of the Secretary-General under consideration and congratulates the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif, on the contribution of his Office in preparing it. We would more particularly like to congratulate and thank Under-Secretary-General Ladsous for the excellent introduction he has just made of the contents of the report. I am pleased that the report acknowledges the progress made by Mali in the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation, highlighting the efforts made by the Government of Mali under the leadership of President Keita, whose commitment and determination in the implementation of the Agreement cannot be questioned, and this I repeat once more before you and the Council, Mr. President.

The Government of Mali is also of the view that restoring State authority throughout the country remains an important challenge to be addressed in order to put an end to the security vacuum and the absence of administration, which is an essential condition for the provision of basic social services to Malian populations in need. Furthermore, the Government of Mali shares the Secretary-General's view that the situation in the centre and north of the country remains worrisome owing to the persistence of asymmetric attacks by terrorist and extremist groups against the civilian population, the Malian security and defence forces and international forces. These factors constitute the main obstacles to the implementation of the Agreement, as called for on all the parties involved in the process, both the Malian parties and the international community symbolized by this body.

The security situation in the centre of the country is of concern to the Government of Mali, which is carrying out several initiatives to contain the terrorist threat, promote coexistence and national reconciliation between the nomadic and settled populations, but also to take into account the aspirations of young people in the centre of the country within the framework of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process.

The Government of Mali, under the authority of President Keita, is aware of the impatience of Mali's partners with regard to the delay in the implementation of certain provisions of the Agreement. However, cognizant of its commitments under the Agreement, the Government side has spared no effort in intensifying its actions over the past three months to advance the peace process. That determination has yielded excellent results despite the very difficult context. Accordingly, under the rubric of institutional policy reform and in accordance with the relevant provisions of the peace Agreement, the process of constitutional reform is well under way. A draft revised constitution, which is now ready, has been submitted to a series of consultations with political parties, signatory armed groups, civil society organizations and traditional leaders. After its adoption by the national representatives, the revised constitution will be submitted for the approval of the Malian people by referendum, which is scheduled for later this year.

Similarly, the Government has appointed the members of the interim authorities and transitional electoral colleges, as well as special advisers to State representatives in the northern regions. In that regard, as Mr. Ladsous reminded us, the Government is working to facilitate discussions among the parties to the Agreement to appoint the officials of the interim authorities and the transitional electoral colleges. On 20 November 2016, the Government organized peaceful local elections, which were held in 644 of the country's 703 communes. The participation rate for those elections stood at 52.51 per cent, in comparison with 51.39 per cent in 2009 and 48.67 per cent in 2004, which proves that citizens have become more interested in local elections. I commend the assistance provided by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and Operation Bharkane forces to the Malian defence and security forces in the run-up to elections.

The Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission is already operational and it has opened regional offices in all regions of Mali, with the exception of Kidal.

In addition, working alongside MINUSMA, the Government has development criteria and deadlines in order to facilitate an assessment of the progress made by the signatories in the implementation of the Agreement, in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 12 of resolution 2295 (2016), of 29 June 2016. I would like to assure the Council that Malian authorities will fully shoulder their responsibility in implementing those benchmarks, which will provide new momentum to the peace process in Mali.

With regard to the issue of defence and security, during the election period, the Chairs and members of the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, the Commission on Integration and the National Council for Security Sector Reform were nominated. The national strategy for the security sector was also developed during that period.

I would like to underscore that the Government of Mali is determined to launch mixed patrols, as we mentioned earlier. Regrettably, that process has not yet started because of the many demands put forward by the other parties to the Agreement, such as, in particular, the request for the adoption of a decree that recognizes the various ranks of those to be included in the mixed patrols prior to their deploymnet. The response to such demands lies in the implementation of the integration programme provided for in the Agreement.

The fragmentation of armed groups is an additional challenge. Mr. Ladsous addressed the rivalry between armed groups, which increases the number of interlocutors and complicates the implementation of the Agreement. That, in turn, has a negative impact on deadlines, which must then be postponed.

In addition to those political and institutional defence and security measures, I would like to emphasize that the Government has continued its development activities on the ground, when security conditions allow, through project and programmes already under way, such as the emergency development programme in the north of the country and the economic recovery and reconstruction programme. The Government has also developed a specific strategy to develop regions in the north of Mali, which is yet to be approved, and proposed a draft law to create a sustainable development fund aimed at financing that strategy. Once again, we call upon friendly countries and partner organizations that pledged contributions during successive conferences on the development Mali to honour their commitments and assist us in implementing the Agreement.

Efforts to implement the Agreement are ongoing. To build on the progress that I have just mentioned, President Keita, who is fully committed to the process, has decided to make 2017 the year to implement the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali from the Algiers process. In his address to the nation on 31 December 2016, the Head of State announced key measures to restore peace and security and achieve national reconciliation. The President also informed the country that interim authorities would be operational during the first quarter of 2017 in all areas in which it was not possible to hold communal elections. Once concluded, that operation will make it possible to speed up the redeployment of the administration and facilitate the restoration of basic social services. It will also allow for a more efficient return and reintegration of refugees and displaced Malians.

The Head of State also announced the holding of the National Accord Conference to be held in March 2017, in accordance with the provisions of article 5 of the Agreement to create an environment for in-depth discussion among all Malian stakeholders on the root causes of the conflict. The goal of the discussion is to develop a charter for peace, unity and national reconciliation. In that regard, an organizing committee, chaired by a high-ranking Malian official, Mr. Baba Akhib Haidara, as mediator, has been established.

As the Council can see, the actions undertaken and measures announced illustrate the Government's determination, under the leadership of the President, to achieve the effective and comprehensive implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. We call upon all Malian parties to show greater commitment and good faith now that we are at a decisive juncture in achieving peace. Our population, having suffered enough, continues to hope for peace dividends. I invite the international community and the Agreement Monitoring Committee to play their role as guarantors of the commitments made by all the parties, while clearly shouldering their responsibilities, in accordance with the provisions article 54 of the Agreement.

With regard to the implementation of resolution 2295 (2016), I would like to point out that new elements have not yet been implemented on the ground. Once again, therefore, I ask the Security Council once again to provide MINUSMA with the adequate resources to enable to fully discharge its stabilization mandate and assist the Government of Mali in gradually regaining control of the country. That is our desire. We will remain committed as a State and will make every human and material effort necessary to assume our responsibility. The Malian defence and security forces will make the necessary sacrifice. Regrettably, we cannot face the challenges alone; we will need the support and assistance of our partners. But meeting those challenges are ultimately still our responsibility. We recognize that.

I draw the Council's attention to the urgent need to strengthen cooperation on the ground between MINUSMA and the Malian defence and security forces. Efforts are under way but must be enhanced. Today's events recall the need to move even faster because our enemies are also determined to do the same.

The process of cantonment and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, which remains a prerequisite for stabilization in Mali, should be sped up. This is an ideal opportunity for us to thank all partners that took part in the donors DDR round table held on 8 December 2016. I call upon them to honour the agreements they made in order to move this important process forward.

Let me make a few comments on the report of the Secretary-General with regard to the human rights and humanitarian situation. With regard to the human rights situation, the report mentions 104 documented cases of human rights abuses and violations between September and December 2016. That reveals a decline in human rights violations and abuses for the period in question compared to the previous report (S/2016/819), thereby showing a considerable improvement of the human the rights situation in Mali. It is to be noted that the great majority of documented cases are the work of armed or terrorist groups and were committed in areas in which legal or investigative services are essentially lacking because of insecurity. During this period, the Human Rights Division of MINUSMA attributed approximately 10 cases of human rights violations to

Malian authorities because of a lack of prosecution or illegal detention. I can assure the Council that all documented cases were processed in the legal system either through opening an investigation or judicial actions. No one will be allowed to enjoy impunity in Mali.

Concerned with further improving the human rights situation, in November 2016 the Government adopted an ambitious national policy on human rights accompanied by an action plan as well as a law protecting defenders of human rights. In the same vein, the Minister for Justice and Human Rights organized together with the Human Rights Division of MINUSMA, which I would like to thank, a training workshop for Malian judges in Bamako. That kind of training will be extended to other actors within the legal system.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, it should be noted that the Government of Mali carried out several actions in areas affected by the crisis during the period covered by the report. Those actions took the form of distributing food assistance to the populations of the Mopti, Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal regions, as well as to Malian refugees in Burkina Faso, the Niger and Mauritania. The Government also rehabilitated, built and equipped administrative services, health centres, schools and water infrastructure in the Timbuktu, Kidal, Gao, Ménaka and Mopti regions. Similary, within the framework of economic renewal, income-generating actions were financed for the benefit of the displaced and repatriated populations in the Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal, Mopti and Ségou regions. Furthermore, schools were opened in Kidal for the 2016-2017 school year, and the State effectively returned to all regional capitals of the North and the district administrative seats with the exception of Kidal.

The situation in Kidal is of particular concern to the Government of Mali because terrorist groups are trying to establish a safe haven there while they continue their abuse of the civilian population and illicit activities facilitated by the criminal economy. The presence of armed and terrorist groups in the area are an obstacle to providing humanitarian assistance and basic social services. I take this opportunity to call on the international community through you, Sir, to exercise the necessary pressure on all parties in Mali, in particular the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad, to honour their commitments under the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, known as the Algiers Agreement.

In conclusion, I reiterate the thanks of the Government and the people of Mali to the United Nations; the countries and institutions that are members of the Agreement Monitoring Committee; the troop-contributing countries; and the international community, in general, for the sacrifices that they have made in order to permanently and sustainably settle the crisis in Mali. I also pay tribute to all the victims of the crisis: the civilian, military, foreign and Malian victims who have fallen for the cause of Mali, and, with whom I wish to include the victims of this morning's attack in Gao. I also commend the outstanding work of the women and men of MINUSMA and the French Operation Barkhane in the stabilization process of Mali. Today, thanks to their support to Mali's defence and security forces and the enormous sacrifices made by the Government and the people of Mali, our country is progressively returning to stability as was shown by the holding of the twenty-seventh Africa-France summit in Bamako only a few days ago that was unanimously hailed as a success.

Lastly, I wish all the members of the Council a Happy New Year.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Boukadoum (Algeria): Let me begin by saying that we are deeply shocked by the cowardly, horrendous attack that targeted a site of the Operational Coordination Mechanism. It is no coincidence that the terrorist attack occurred at this time and against Malian forces and elements of the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) and the Platform coalition of armed groups, which are all signatories of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. They are being regrouped to train for the long-awaited deployment of the joint patrols. We extend our sincerest condolences to the families of the victims, the Malian authorities represented here by His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Diop, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and African Integration. This attack should be seen as a cruel reminder that our resolve must not waver. On the contrary, our resolve and the support of the Security Council for the implementation of the peace Agreement should further grow.

Let me also add that Sweden has brilliantly begun its mandate in the Security Council with a presidency replete with inspired initiatives. I congratulate the Swedish presidency for everything that it has done in the Security Council since the beginning of the year and thank it for inviting Algeria to share with members our thoughts concerning the mediation efforts and notably the follow-up of the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, known as the Algiers Agreement, signed more than 18 months ago.

This meeting is a timely opportunity to take stock of all that has been done and all that is being done at this very moment — continuously and intensively — and inform one another on how to impact our common endeavour in the most positive spirit and way. And in that regard, I thank Under-Secretary-General Hervé Ladsous. The ultimate goal is the sustainable establishment of peace and reconciliation in our brotherly country of Mali.

I will begin by underlying several elements that should not to be set aside in difficult times. Everyone, including the Malian authorities and all other parties to the Algiers Agreement, have regularly and constantly — no matter the trying times that we have faced and are facing — stated their complete and unequivocal support and commitment to the full implementation of the Algiers Agreement. It is of the utmost importance that all stakeholders, including the Security Council and the Secretariat, which took full part in the mediation process and are part of the follow-up mechanism, continue to show their vital support and confidence in every circumstance, and, more precisely, to the follow-up mechanism of the Agreement. That particular aspect of the process shows that we are all on board and that we must remain together.

The following are questions that should be asked at this juncture: How can we help parties and stake holders fulfil their obligations under the Algiers Agreement? What kind of positive input can we add for the sake of fulfilling our goals? How can we improve the general atmosphere to be conducive to those goals. Lastly, how can we help the Malian authorities while knowing that delays or power vacuums will be exploited by outcasts and outlaws — as happened earlier this morning — for which not only Malian citizens but also the Blue Helmets of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) are paying too high a price?

I should emphasize once again that the strategic goal — and our very raison d'être — is peace and reconciliation, and that the means to it is mediation. It is true that we have not yet reached that destination, but we cannot and must not give up in the face of the adversities we encounter on the way. We all knew that the task would not be easy and that as time went on and expectations continued unfulfilled, that would fuel the challenges, frustrations and doubts. Clearly, that means that we must work hard to try to achieve our shared goals faster, but at the same time we should be very cautious about any move that could derail a process that has been so difficult to build.

For all those reasons, we believe it is important to be frank about the fact that in the context, it is vital that the Security Council reaffirm its encouragement and support to the Algiers Agreement and the follow-up mechanism. As leader of the mechanism, Algeria will reliably and faithfully relay to the Council whatever action may be considered necessary, including between scheduled meetings. Obviously, we assume that the sustained collaboration and exchanges with the Secretariat and MINUSMA — everyone is on board, as we know — will hold up.

There are clearly obstacles and difficulties to the speedy implementation of what has been agreed to and defined in the Algiers Agreement, and which we and all of the stakeholders have called for. I should note — and Mr. Diop confirmed just now — that the Malian authorities have repeatedly assured us of their willingness to work to achieve it. I should add that so far our impression is that the other Malian parties to the Algiers Agreement are not contesting its implementation. It is therefore crucial that we continue with the persuasion needed to convince and encourage them to stand by their commitment and ensure that they understand that there will be only positive gains if they stick to the wisdom of positive engagement and reconciliation. It is also crucial to ensure that no gaps or misunderstandings that might emerge in the implementation of the Agreement — and such things do naturally occur in complex situations — are used as a pretext either for backing out of or unnecessarily threatening the whole process. No one has the right to put the process at risk through unjustified action or constant questioning of things that have already been fully agreed on.

In that regard, we find it highly commendable that the Malian authorities have agreed that the High Representative of Mali's President Keita should be designated to foster the implementation of the Agreement by chairing an ad hoc committee created by the Comité de suivi de l'accord in order to smooth out the problems raised recently by one of the signatories to the Agreement. We have high hopes that this recent initiative will help to clear the way for all the other measures to be taken, including disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, joint patrols and, of course, interim administration. We note that the issues that have been raised are about the modalities of the implementation rather than its substance, so we should continue to encourage everyone to act on this in a spirit of good will.

We are also very pleased that the top-level Malian authorities have committed to holding a national reconciliation conference in the near future that would definitely pave the way for full reconciliation. I should point out that reconciliation is Mali's business and it is Malians, using the appropriate mechanisms, who should decide it by and for themselves. Our responsibility and that of the Mechanism, the United Nations and all other stakeholders is solely to stand by them.

Through the way it was conceived — with inclusiveness, international support, commitment on the part of Mali's neighbours and the backing of the African Union and the United Nations — the mediation process has proved its uniqueness and will stand as a role model for other crisis situations. If it is to succeed, is vital to ensure that it is fully supported. Mr. António Guterres, our new Secretary-General, said in his first address to the General Assembly (see A/71/PV.60) that he envisions his efforts to promote prevention and resolve crises as relying on the parties involved and on the help and commitment of neighbouring States and regional mechanisms and organizations.

The peace and reconciliation process in Mali fits that vision exactly. If Mali is to be a success story, it must first be a success story for Malians; then for all Mali's neighbours, including Algeria, because of our naturally interlinked relations; and ultimately for the international community as a whole with, at its heart, the United Nations, which has also invested so much in terms of sacrifices as well as deployment. Needless to say, in a region — the whole of the Sahel and beyond — where terrorism and transnational crime go hand in hand and are growing in size and impact in their pursuit of their evil objectives, failure cannot be an option. It is vital that we restore the legitimate Malian authorities' command over their entire territory, which also requires strengthening Mali's security forces, as well as ensuring reconciliation between all Malians through bold mechanisms that they will freely choose for themselves.

Those are the issues that we wanted to share with the Security Council. As I ask for the Council's renewed support, I would like to assure members that as leader of the follow-up mechanism, Algeria has committed huge human and material resources in the cause of peace and reconciliation in our brotherly neighbour Mali and will not back away from its responsibilities towards all Malians and their leaders. We will always be on their side, because it is the side of righteousness, justice and peace.

The President: I thank Mr. Boukadoum for his briefing.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7865

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7865th meeting

Wednesday, 18 January 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Skoog	(Sweden)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Sadykov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

Non-proliferation

Letter dated 27 December 2016 from the Security Council Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2016/1113)

Second report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2016/1136).

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Non-proliferation

Letter dated 27 December 2016 from the Security Council Facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2016/1113)

Second report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2016/1136)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Germany to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following to participate in this meeting: Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and His Excellency Mr. João Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs; His Excellency Mr. João Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; and His Excellency Mr. Sebastiano Cardi, Permanent Representative of Italy, in his capacity as facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

I now give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: On 16 January, the United Nations welcomed the first anniversary of implementation day of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was endorsed by resolution 2231 (2015). One year on, the Secretary-General is encouraged by the continued reaffirmation by all JCPOA participants, including during the meeting of the Joint Commission in Vienna on 10 January, of their unequivocal commitment to the full and effective implementation of the agreement.

The JCPOA — adopted by the E3/EU+3 and Iran on 14 July 2015 — is a good example of how multilateral diplomacy, political will and perseverance can resolve the most complex issues. It is imperative that, as participants, the United Nations and the broader international community continue to support the full implementation of that historic multilateral agreement for its full duration. Its comprehensive and sustained implementation ensures that Iran's nuclear programme will remain exclusively peaceful. It will help realize the long-awaited aspirations of the Iranian people to be reconnected to the global economy and bring to a satisfactory conclusion the consideration of the Iranian nuclear issue by the Security Council.

Today's meeting of the Security Council is taking place against a backdrop of steady implementation, cooperation and progress. Since Implementation Day, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has issued five reports documenting continued implementation by Iran of its nuclear-related commitments. In her statement on the first anniversary of implementation day, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms. Federica Mogherini, noted that the lifting of the nuclear-related sanctions, as promised in the agreement, resulted in "a surge in bilateral trade and investment in Iran, contributing to better living standards for the benefit of all". The Secretary-General has underscored the importance of all JCPOA participants accruing equally the full benefits of the agreement and calls upon all its participants to continue to work together in good faith and reciprocity.

I am grateful for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on the second report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2016/1136). The report was submitted to the Council on 30 December 2016, pursuant to annex B to resolution 2231 (2015) and paragraph 7 of the note by the President of the Council, issued on 16 January 2016 (S/2016/44).

As guided by the Security Council, the report of the Secretary-General focuses on the implementation of the provisions contained in annex B to resolution 2231 (2015). It does not cover the implementation of annex A to the resolution, namely, the implementation of its nuclear-related commitments by Iran and of the sanctions-lifting commitments entered into by other participants, nor does it touch upon issues falling within the remit of the Joint Commission.

I now turn to the main findings and recommendations of the second report of the Secretary-General related to annex B of resolution 2231 (2015).

First, the Secretary-General has not received any report, nor is he aware of any open-source information regarding the supply, sale or transfer to Iran of nuclear-related items undertaken contrary to the provisions of the resolution. Moreover, and also on an encouraging note, Member States have made greater use of the procurement-channel process, through which the transfer of nuclear-related items is approved by the Council on the basis of recommendation provided by the Joint Commission. Five nuclear-related proposals have been submitted since July 2016. Three of those proposals have been approved; the other two are still under consideration. Those proposals have been processed in accordance with the timelines established by resolution 2231 (2015), with due regard for information security and confidentiality. The operational linkages established between the Security Council and the Procurement Working Group of the Joint Commission are functioning well. I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the excellent cooperation that we have had with the European External Action Service, especially with the Coordinator of the Procurement Working Group of the Joint Commission.

Secondly, the Secretary-General has also not received any information regarding Iranian ballistic-missile activities or ballistic-missile-related transfers to Iran undertaken contrary to the relevant provisions of the resolution.

Thirdly, in terms of the restrictions on arms-related transfers, the report includes information on the seizure by the French Navy of an arms shipment in the Northern Indian Ocean in March 2016. France concluded that the arms shipment had originated in Iran and that that transfer had been undertaken contrary to annex B of the resolution. In addition, the Secretariat also received information from Australia and the Combined Maritime Forces about another arms seizure by the Royal Australian Navy, which took place off the coast of Oman in February 2016. That shipment of arms was also assessed by the United States Navy to have originated in Iran. Both seizures bear strong similarities with the one reported by the United States in June 2016 and mentioned in the first report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/589). The Secretariat is looking forward to the opportunity to examine the arms seized in all three instances and to obtain additional information in order to corroborate the information provided and independently ascertain the origin of those shipments.

Still on the subject of arms-related transfers, of particular concern is the June 2016 televised statement by the Secretary-General of Hizbullah that Hizbullah receives its salaries, expenses, weapons and missiles from Iran. That statement suggests that transfers of arms from Iran to Hizbullah may have been undertaken contrary to resolution 2231 (2015). In addition, the report notes the November 2016 letter by Israel to the Secretary-General and the Council about the alleged use of commercial flights by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to transfer arms and related materiel to Hizbullah (S/2016/987), and the subsequent response from Iran that such claims were baseless and unsubstantiated accusations (S/2016/992).

With regard to the case of the Iranian participation in an arms exhibition held in Baghdad in March 2016, which was presented in the first report of the Secretary-General on this issue, I am able to inform the Council today that Iraqi authorities confirmed in October 2016 that all items exhibited have been returned to Iran. Therefore, no further follow-up will be taken by the Secretariat in relation to that matter.

Finally, the report draws the attention of Council members to possible ongoing travel-ban violations by individuals on the list maintained pursuant to resolution 2231 (2015). The report includes information about two possible foreign trips by Brigadier General Naqdi and about numerous possible foreign trips by Major General Soleimani, which are supported by photographic evidence released by Iranian and other regional media outlets. The Secretariat raised those possible violations with the countries involved. Iraq and Syria did not deny or confirm that information, but emphasized that no invitations had been extended nor were visas issued by their respective authorities to those individuals.

In response to the Secretariat's request for clarification with regard to the possible transfer of arms to Hizbullah, as well as the possible travel-ban violations, Iran underlined that

> "measures undertaken by Iran in combating terrorism and violent extremism in the region have been consistent with its national security interests and international commitments".

Looking forward to the second year of the implementation of the JCPOA, I would like to reaffirm once again the particular responsibilities of JCPOA participants to implement the agreement fully and effectively. The wider international community also has an interest in and must contribute to the long-term implementation of the agreement.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the leadership of Ambassador Román Oyarzun Marchesi of Spain in his role as facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) in 2016. I would also like to congratulate Ambassador Sebastiano Cardi of Italy on his selection as facilitator for 2017. Ambassador Cardi and the Security Council can count on the full support of the United Nations Secretariat in his stewardship of the resolution endorsing that historic agreement.

The President: I thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Vale de Almeida.

Mr. Vale de Almeida: I am honoured to address the Council today on behalf of the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in her capacity as the Coordinator of the Joint Commission established by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), to whom I will refer simply as the "Coordinator".

In today's world, the number of challenges we have to face prevents us from focusing on the successes we have achieved. This debate comes just two days after the first anniversary of the implementation day of the JCPOA. That agreement was a major achievement. It was born of the efforts of the E3/EU+3, coordinated by the European Union (EU) High Representative and Iran; however, it now belongs to the international community through its endorsement by the Council in resolution 2231 (2016). In the past, many predicted that we would never reach an agreement or that, even if we did, it would not last for long. Not only did we reach an agreement, but we are now clearly making progress in implementing it. Since implementation day, important steps have been taken by all parties towards the successful implementation of the deal. In the course of this year, all JCPOA participants have fulfilled their commitments. Iran has implemented its nuclear obligations, and the United Nations, the EU and the United States have lifted, as agreed, the nuclear-related economic and financial sanctions.

The adherence of Iran to its commitments is being closely monitored and has been confirmed by four International Atomic Energy Agency reports up to now. That is essential in order to deliver on the goal of a civilian nuclear programme exclusively for peaceful purposes. The lifting of sanctions has also led to a surge in trade and investment with Iran. To give just an example, bilateral trade between the EU and Iran has risen by a staggering 63 per cent over the first three quarters of 2016. More efforts are needed to make sure that those benefits are felt by our populations, but the trend is clear and progress undeniable.

However, JCPOA implementation is an ongoing task, and we expect full and effective implementation by all sides throughout the lifetime of the agreement. The EU High Representative, as the Coordinator of the Joint Commission, which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the deal, remains committed to that goal. The EU High Representative, or her designated representative, has already chaired six JCPOA Joint Commission meetings, which have monitored and provided guidance on implementation issues. At the latest meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission on 10 January 2017, all sides reaffirmed their strong commitment to continued full and effective implementation of the JCPOA. The rigorous implementation of commitments by all sides is the best way to continue to build trust, to strengthen the JCPOA and to overcome the hurdles that are part of all comprehensive and far-reaching deals.

I would also like at this point to extend my gratitude to former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, as well as to Ambassador Román Oyarzun Marchesi, who served as the facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) in 2016, for the excellent cooperation since Implementation Day. I would also like to welcome the new Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, as well as Ambassador Sebastiano Cardi of Italy, who will serve as the facilitator for the implementation of the resolution in 2017. Once again, let me thank our colleagues in the Security Council Affairs Division for their unwavering support regarding the establishment of the procurement channel. I would also like to take note of the latest report of the Secretary General on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2016/1136).

I will now focus on the work of the Procurement Working Group. The EU High Representative, as Coordinator of the Joint Commission and the Procurement Working Group, is responsible for the smooth operation of that newly established mechanism, which has been tasked with reviewing proposals by States seeking to engage in activities with Iran that involve nuclear and non-nuclear civilian end-uses. On implementation day, the Joint Commission established the Procurement Working Group, which is comprised of representatives of the E3+3 and Iran and is coordinated by the EU High Representative. The Group has been in full operation since its establishment. The first proposals received through the procurement channel have been reviewed and approved. That is a clear demonstration that the established procurement mechanism works.

Transparency has been one of our guiding principles during the negotiations and a cornerstone of the JCPOA. According to para 6.10 of JCPOA annex IV, the Joint Commission shall report to the Security Council every six months on the status of the Procurement Working Group's decisions and on any implementation issues. In that context, on 23 December 2016, the coordinator of the Procurement Working Group submitted to the facilitator, on behalf of the Joint Commission, the Group's second report to the Security Council on the work of the Group in support of the implementation of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015) (see S/2016/1113). The report seeks to provide the facilitator and Security Council members with an overview of the work undertaken by the Procurement Working Group from 7 July to 22 December 2016.

During the period under review, the participants in the Procurement Working Group, coordinated by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, continued working intensively to further develop the modalities of its operation. The participants have held six meetings, and in one of those meetings the International Atomic Energy Agency participated as an observer. The Group has made great efforts to be as transparent as possible without compromising confidentiality, by reaching out to third States and promoting a better understanding of its aims, objectives and review process.

We have taken note of the points raised by third-party States during those outreach meetings. In that respect, during the reporting period, the Joint Commission updated several documents relating to the work of the Procurement Working Group. All of those documents have been published on the Security Council's dedicated web page on resolution 2231 (2015). The Procurement Working Group also responded to an inquiry put forward by one State through the Security Council. The work we have undertaken so far has proven that it is possible to reach agreements, even on the most contentious issues, and to implement them, provided that there is a will to do so.

Let me conclude by reiterating the European Union's resolute willingness to respect the JCPOA and work for its success throughout its lifetime. We call on all the other parties to do likewise and to remain committed to the full implementation of the JCPOA and of resolution 2231 (2015) in all its dimensions. That is essential if we wish to continue building trust among all and shore up multilateral diplomacy.

The President: I now give the floor to Ambassador Cardi.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): Before I start my statement as facilitator for the implementation of Security Council resolution 2231 (2016), let me also say goodbye to Ambassador Samantha Power. In Italian, when we want to say goodbye, we say arrivederci, which means, "Until we see each other again". I think that wish is shared by many around this table and at the United Nations.

I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting, as well as Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman and Ambassador João Vale de Almeida for their briefings.

Today I will touch on three aspects of the report of the facilitator covering the period 16 July 2016 through 15 January 2017. I will touch first on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA); secondly, on the monitoring of the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015); and, thirdly, on the developments in the procurement channel. The full version of the report has been circulated to the Council members, and will be issued shortly under the symbol S/2017/49.

First, with regard to the JCPOA, I, like others, find it fitting to start with the JCPOA, considering that two days ago was the first anniversary of Implementation Day. During the reporting period, in line with paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General submitted two quarterly reports on verification and monitoring activities. In both reports, the Agency affirms that Iran has not pursued construction of the existing Arak heavy-water research reactor based on its original design, and that Iran has not conducted any uranium-enrichment or related research and activities at the Fordow fuel-enrichment plant. In addition, at the end of the reporting period, the Director General of the IAEA confirmed that on 15 January the Agency verified that Iran had removed all excess centrifuges and infrastructure from the Fordow plant, in line with its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA.

In its quarterly reports, the Agency affirms that Iran has continued to permit the Agency to use online enrichment monitors and electronic seals that communicate the status within the Iranian nuclear sites to Agency inspectors and facilitate the automatic collection of measurement recordings by the Agency. Both reports also affirm Iran's continued cooperation with the JCPOA-specified monitoring of uranium ore concentrate in Iran.

Secondly, with regard to the monitoring of the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), during the reporting period the facilitator did not receive information on alleged actions inconsistent with resolution 2231 (2015). At the same time, the facilitator took note of the letter from Israel to the President of the Security Council (S/2016/987) and the letter of the Islamic Republic of Iran in reply (S/2016/992). As of the closing date of my report, there has been no formal reply to the facilitator's letters of 17 June and 22 July 2016, which invited the Iranian Government to comment on two alleged instances of arms transfers referred to in the first biannual report of the facilitator. Nonetheless, during the facilitator's efforts to contact the Iranian Government so as to seek clarification about those two cases, the Permanent Mission of Iran rejected the allegation and reiterated that Iran had never engaged in the alleged deliveries.

During the reference period, transparency, practical guidance and outreach remain the priorities, since a proper understanding of resolution 2231 (2015) by all is required for its full implementation. The Council responded to a request for guidance regarding access to foreign imports by Iranian-flag vessels seeking to load and unload goods. Moreover, in response to a request submitted through the facilitator, the Joint Commission provided guidance on temporary nuclear-related transfers to Iran.

Thirdly, with regard to developments in the procurement channel, the Council had received, as of mid-July 2016, only one proposal, later withdrawn, to participate in and permit the activities set forth in paragraph 2 of annex B to resolution 2231 (2015). During the reporting period, the procurement channel started working more regularly and processed five proposals that two Member States had submitted to the Security Council. Three proposals have already been approved, while the remaining two are currently under review by the Joint Commission in Vienna. In order to enhance information exchange between the Joint Commission and the representatives of the Security Council dealing with the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), I will be organizing a meeting with the Coordinator of the Procurement Working Group here in New York in the coming weeks, similar to the meeting held in February of last year to discuss the functioning of the procurement channel.

Let me conclude, by underlining that, from 18 July to 20 December 2016, there were more than 72,000 page views of the resolution 2231 (2015) website, a key channel of information, for a total of more than 140,000 page views since its creation. Those figures show a marked interest in the implementation of the resolution, including in the functioning of the procurement channel, whose activities are likely to increase in the coming months.

The President: I thank Mr. Cardi for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank you, Mr. President, from the bottom of my heart for your comments at the opening of today's meetings, which really moved me. When I play them later for my children, it will move them too.

I thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman, Ambassador Cardi, Ambassador Vale de Almeida for their briefings and for all their work on this important topic. I know that the United States Mission looks forward to working with Ambassador Cardi in his new role as the Council's facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015). I agree with the sentiment that he expressed in Italian in terms of saying "Goodbye, but we will see you soon".

This will be my final meeting in the Security Council, I think, so I would like to start by saying "thank you". First, above all, I want to give thanks to President Obama for giving me this opportunity and I want to thank my fellow diplomats in the Chamber for their friendship, their camaraderie and their dedication, all of which they have shown in spades over the past three and a half years towards me and towards the subjects that we work on together. Of course, we may not always agree. Indeed, we have at times disagreed quite pointedly, but it has been the privilege of my life to be able to work with each of them.

We have not achieved nearly as much as I would have liked. The failures of the Council to respond to the mass atrocities in Syria and South Sudan are glaring and indeed haunting, but I know from working with every single individual at this table that we have achieved much more than we would have had it not been for their creativity and their individual will to find a way forward on tough issues.

Diplomacy is about people in two respects. We diplomats must help people who are suffering the horrific costs of conflict, but we diplomats are people and when the Council functions, it is often because individuals in this Chamber have lobbied their capitals for a change in instructions or for flexibility in the cause of peace. While we, who have the privilege of sitting around this table, may get the attention, we also know that our work would not be possible without the people sitting behind us and in the booths above us and many others in our Governments who never even get to join us in the Chamber: the teams of diplomats and foreign service officers at our respective missions, the officials in our capitals and embassies abroad who feed into our work, as well as the staff at the United Nations who make these meetings possible — from the Security Council Affairs Division to the inexhaustible interpreters, to the staff from across the United Nations who brief the Council, write the reports that we consume and provide information from the field often at great risk to themselves. I offer a special thanks to my truly remarkable team at the United States Mission who works tirelessly to try to make the world better. It has been an honour to work with all of them.

I am fortunate today to be able to deliver my last set of remarks on an issue that shows just how much we can achieve by using the tools in our toolbox at the Security Council. An issue where the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, China, Russia and the European Union were able to all come together — first to impose powerful sanctions against Iran, including in 2010 after receiving information that Iran was building a covert enrichment facility and then to have the courage and the creativity to negotiate a deal — the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which cut off Iran's pathways to a nuclear weapon and verified Iran's compliance through the most extensive inspection regime ever developed for nuclear programme.

I take note, as I depart, that some on the Council are expressing what seems to be a growing scepticism about the efficacy of sanctions. It is more than reasonable to raise questions. Sanctions are not suited to every crisis. They alone are never a panacea. They cannot be treated as an end in themselves and sanctions almost never provide instant gratification of the kind that the news cycle seems to demand. It took almost nine years from when the Council first imposed sanctions on Iran and multiple rounds of new sanctions after that before the P5+1 and Iran were able to conclude the JCPOA. However, sanctions were an absolutely essential tool to bring Iran to the table and to keep Iran negotiating until we reach the diplomatic outcome that we sought, one that has significantly enhanced our collective security. We never would have reached this goal without uniting to impose sanctions and without working to ensure that our resolutions were enforced. This lessons applies not only when dealing with the threat of nuclear non-proliferation, but also to other threats to international peace and security, from genocide to terrorism and violations of other States' territorial integrity.

But beyond showing how effective sanctions can be, the JCPOA also shows the life and death importance of diplomacy — hard-nosed diplomacy. The United Nations was created as the premier venue for diplomacy. As Winston Churchill once put it, "To jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war". Reaching this deal — the JCPOA — like so many of the collective achievements of which we are most proud, including the global response to the Ebola outbreak, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Goals — required gruelling, at times exasperating negotiations and countless hours invested by diplomats, technical experts and even many of us at this table. There were times in each of these efforts when we thought we would not be able to reach an agreement, that the differences were just too great, the suspicions too deep, when we wanted to give up, walk away and go home to spend more time with our families who are far easier to get along with than our foreign counterparts in negotiations.

But in these and so many other instances we achieved something together that none of us could have come close to achieving alone. While, of course, there are other threats to which we have invested similar time and energy and sweat, but have not been able to find solutions or consensus — the Syria war and the quest for Middle East peace being the two most obvious examples — is there anybody here who would have rather that we not have tried? Of course, there is not. I am proud to have served a President who believes in the power of principled diplomacy, not out of a naïve belief that we will always succeed, but rather because of a clear-eyed empirical assessment that our security often necessitates collective action and that while at times diplomacy may not be enough, there is never a time when it is not needed.

It has now been a year and a half since the JCPOA was concluded and one year since what we call implementation day, when the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) verified that Iran had completed the nuclear-related commitments required for sanctions relief. What we know after all this time is that the JCPOA is working. All of the deal's participants are keeping their commitments. Consider what that means, what the deal has achieved. Iran's plutonium reactor core at Arak is now filled with concrete. The IAEA has confirmed that Iran has dismantled two-thirds of its centrifuges and shipped out 98 per cent of its enriched uranium. What is left of Iran's uranium stockpile is under continuous watch to make sure that it stays within the limits that the JCPOA put in place. For our part, the United States has fully implemented its commitments to lift nuclear-related sanctions as specified in the JCPOA.

In the Council, the mechanisms that we created to support the JCPOA are working as intended. When States want to pursue the nuclear-related activities permitted under the JCPOA that require the Council's approval, the Council is ready to consider their request. Reporting is also happening with the appropriate division of labour with the Secretary-General reporting on the restrictions that apply to Iran under resolution 2231 (2016) while the Joint Commission monitors implementation of the JCPOA.

However, recognizing this progress on Iran's nuclear issues should not distract the Council from Iran's other actions that continue to destabilize the Middle East in ways that affect a lot of issues on the Council's agenda. This is after all a regime that repeatedly threatens Israel and that continues to violate the human rights of its own people. Under Secretary-General Feltman has informed the Council about reports of Iranian non-compliance with the remaining arms transfer and travel restrictions in resolution 2231 (2016). These reports include new information about interdictions of arms exported from Iran, transfers Hizbullah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah has openly boasted about in his public speeches even as resolution 2231 (2016) prohibits these shipments. Israel has also reported to the United Nations that Iran uses commercial flights to supply arms to Hizbullah. According to the Secretary-General's report, Iran did not even deny these allegations when the United Nations asked about them.

These arms transfers should be deeply troubling to each member of the Council in part because Iran is clearly defying a resolution the Council unanimously supported. Therefore, even though Iran is living up to its nuclear commitments, we on the Council need to come together to push Iran to effectively implement the binding provisions of resolution 2231 (2016), especially restrictions that ban Iran's export of arms and related material and that ban all Member States from transferring to Iran advanced weapon systems, like missiles, tanks and combat aircraft.

That also means every Member State needs to enforce the travel restrictions that remain in effect under resolution 2231 (2015). The Secretary-General's report (S/2016/1136) notes that both Major General Qasem Soleimani and Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naqdi have travelled to Iraq and Syria, in defiance of the Council's decisions. That is and should be unacceptable to all of us.

As we have said before, the strength of resolution 2231 (2015) comes from the commitment of Member States to enforcing it, and the United States calls on them to do so. It is clear that, with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the world today is better off than it was before. Even though there is a long way to go in countering Iran's destabilizing behaviour in the Middle East, any world where Iran is not pursuing a nuclear weapon is a safer world. Looking ahead, as this deal is likely to be subjected to even greater scrutiny than it is at present, it is important for all of us — here and outside, in all of our nations — to remember that it is much harder to build up frameworks and institutions than to tear them down. The progress we have achieved, so far, depends on maintaining our collective determination to sustain the JCPOA. So, we, and each of the JCPOA participants need to stand by the commitments that we have made and work even harder to make sure that all States comply with their obligations under resolution 2231 (2015), and we need to remember that if negotiating an Iran nuclear deal was possible then we on the Council have it within our power to act decisively when other crises demand it.

Let me conclude with an idea — fittingly, given the Swedish presidency, from a renowned Swedish author, Elin Wägner, who said that values and ideals are like those old-fashioned bicycle lights. They do not light up until and unless you start to pedal forward. That can be said for so much of the work we aspire to do on the Council, and it is true of all of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Unless we pedal, they do not light up. The principles do not become real for real people out in the real wold. Problems do not get fixed, conflicts drag on, crushing poverty persists. Unless we pedal hard and pedal together, we do not make the impact that we seek. We do not make the impact that we, who are sent here by our citizens and people, are here to make. And we must keep working to make those principles real, because as I have tried to underscore so often, the lives of so many people depend on those principles being turned into practice.

To the girl fleeing armed soldiers in South Sudan, making protection more than a promise in a mandate, means the difference between life and death. To the child in a besieged city in Syria, the prohibition on the bombing of schools and hospitals may mean the difference between life and death. To the man or woman in Uganda or North Korea, the idea that a person should not be locked up for who you love or what you believe might mean the difference between a life of freedom and a life of imprisonment or harassment. So, as I leave, I urge the Council to keep pedaling and to not give up, especially when it seems hard. Make sure that those principles in the United Nations Charter light up. Do not let them go dark for the people who count on us. I wish the Council all the best in the months and years ahead, and I reiterate my thanks for the professionalism and friendship of its members.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I want to begin by paying tribute to Ms. Power in her final appearance in the Security Council. Throughout my time here, she has been that hard pedaling dynamo that she just described. She has been a tireless advocate, a passionate campaigner, a trusted ally and a true friend. She has shown an unrelenting personal commitment to tackling the most troubling issues: Syria, Ebola, the Central African Republic and human rights. And on all those issues and so many more, she has grounded our diplomacy in humanity, bringing the voices of real people affected by those conflicts into the Chamber.

Turning to Iran, let me join others in welcoming the second report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2016/1136). I thank our briefers for their remarks just now. I would also like to welcome Mr. Cardi to his new role as facilitator for resolution 2231 (2015). He takes on the role at an important time. We have a significant year ahead of us on the Iran nuclear dossier, but 12 months on from implementation day, I think it is right to first look back on how far we have come. We have seen Iran remove 13,000 centrifuges, as well as associated infrastructure, and eliminate its stock of 20 per cent enriched uranium. We have seen the possibility of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons disappear for over a decade. We have seen Iran work with us and our E3+3 partners, in the Joint Commission and the working groups established under the deal, and we are pleased that the procurement channel, established for the export of nuclear-related goods and services to Iran is fully functional. Applications are being approved, confidentiality is being respected and we hope to receive applications from many more countries over the coming year.

And in turn, we have also seen economic prospects improve in Iran with United Kingdom exports, for instance, to Iran growing by 42 per cent in just nine months, last year. We remain committed to ensuring that trade continues to grow to the tangible economic benefit of the Iranian people under the joint comprehensive plan of action (JCPOA). The second phase of sanctions lifting, which will commence a maximum of eight years after implementation date, provides a further incentive for Iran to comply with the deal, but we remain committed to ensuring that the sanctions that remain in place, continue to be enforced robustly.

Away from the nuclear file, Iran continues to play a destabilizing role in the region. That is most clearly seen in Syria. Iran has failed to uphold its obligations under international humanitarian law in Syria, for instance, by failing to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid into eastern Aleppo, as it was besieged. So we need to recognize the fundamental tension in Iran's engagement with the world. On the one hand, through the Iran deal, they were part of an indisputable diplomatic success, one that degraded a significant threat to the region, and yet on the other, we need only look to the victims of Aleppo to see how Iran's engagement in the region remains, so often, misguided. Iran continues to provide substantial military and financial support to Hizbullah and the Syrian regime.

As the Secretary-General's report makes clear, the leader of Hizbullah stated that Iran supplies all their weapons and missiles. Senior Iranian individuals listed under resolution 2231 (2015), continue to flout the travel ban imposed by the Council, with Major General Soleimani pictured in Aleppo in September, in a show of support for the Syrian regime. Those actions show that Iran chooses to complicate, not extinguish a conflict that has persisted for far too long, and that is simply not the way to build our confidence.

Iran must take clear steps to improve its engagement in the region, this year. We welcome the latest International Atomic Energy Agency report (S/2016/983, annex), which confirmed that Iran continue to comply, broadly, with its nuclear commitments and we expect Iran to continue to do so, this year. But in order to benefit fully from the lifting of United Nations, European Union and United States sanctions, Iran must build that confidence among the international community and show that it has changed its disruptive behaviour in the region.

Therefore, it is vital that Member States continue to enforce the sanctions regime by acting on and reporting all suspected violations. We echo the Secretary-General's call for all Member States to take the necessary measures to prevent entry or transit of Iranians subject to travel bans. We also urge Member States to consider whether exporting arms to Iran is in the best interests of the region. In addition, we remain concerned by Iran's ballistic missile program, and we urge all Member States to continue to enforce the sanctions regime on ballistic missile technology and to act on and report all suspected violations. As one of the architects of the JCPOA, the United Kingdom remains committed to ensuring that the Iran deal is a success.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of France, but also in my personal capacity, let me begin by paying special tribute to our colleague and friend Samantha Power for her outstanding work and her exemplary and tireless commitment to the values of the United Nations. Ambassador Power is an exceptional person, and I address to her from the bottom of my heart my friendship and most cordial personal and professional wishes for all the best in the next chapter in her life.

I would also like to congratulate our Italian colleague, Mr. Sebastiano Cardi, for having taken over from our Spanish colleague the role of facilitator of the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

Almost a year ago, on 16 January 2016, the Council received assurances from the International Atomic Energy Agency that Iran had successfully implemented the preliminary actions related to the nuclear field and specified in the agreement concluded on 14 July 2015 in Vienna between the E3+3 and Iran, paving the way for its implementation. The adoption of the Vienna agreement and its endorsement by the Council, through resolution 2231 (2015), marked an important step, as it strictly governed Iran's nuclear activities over the life of the agreement, with the ultimate objective of re-establishing, in the end, confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme. At that time, we welcomed this important achievement, with regard both to our sustained efforts aimed at non-proliferation and, more broadly, for stability in the region and for international peace and security.

Over the past year, the E3+3 countries have implemented their commitments in full. A very close follow-up of the implementation of Iran's nuclear commitments has been put in place with a view to promoting transparency and efficiency. In that context, France fully supports the rigorous implementation of all the provisions of the agreement and the monitoring of the commitments of the parties over the long term. The International Atomic Energy Agency has a crucial role and has been diligently pursuing its verification and monitoring activities of Iran's implementation of its nuclear commitments, in accordance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

I would also like to express our satisfaction with the recent publication of documents approved between the E3+3 and Iran in the framework of the Joint Commission established by the agreement. It contributes to the proper implementation of the agreement by increasing transparency towards the entire international community in the monitoring of the implementation of the Iranian commitments. It allows everyone to see the detail and modalities of verification of Iranian commitments under the Vienna agreement and to evaluate compliance with them in an informed manner.

In that context of rigor and transparency, we see that the benefits of the agreement for Iran are beginning to be felt. On the economic and commercial front, bilateral trade between France and Iran has increased by 200 per cent in value since January 2016. Iranian oil exports are continuously increasing. The French Government, in conjunction with its partners in the European Union, has continued its efforts to provide companies with the necessary information and guidance on the lifting of sanctions in order to support their return to Iran. We will continue along that path.

Furthermore, in the nuclear field and within the framework strictly determined by the agreement and in accordance with its provisions, our two countries have initiated discussions on the launching of bilateral cooperation in the area of security and in certain fields of magnetic confinement fusion. Finally, several requests for the transfer of goods whose export is governed by resolution 2231 (2015) have been submitted through the procurement channel established by the agreement and have been approved by the members of the Council. Nevertheless, the establishment of a climate of lasting confidence requires full respect for the commitments made not only under the Vienna agreement but also under resolution 2231 (2015), which endorsed it.

I would like to express our concern with regard to the information on Iran's failure to comply with several important provisions of resolution 2231 (2015) over the past six months, which is contained in the full and factual report (S/2016/1136) that was presented to us. We remain very concerned about the information that has been detailed to us today. I am referring, of course, to the Iranian arms seizures in 2016, mentioned in the report, by Australia and the Combined Maritime Forces and by my own country, which constitute violations of annex B of resolution 2231 (2015). In the same vein, I am referring in particular to the information available to us on the arms transfers between Iran and Hizbullah, which are of great concern to us.

Furthermore, we are equally concerned about the information relating to the travel abroad of Major General Soleimani and Brigadier General Naqdi, even though they are subject to a travel ban decided by the Security Council and confirmed by resolution 2231 (2015). It is essential for regional stability and international security that Iran should refrain from any destabilizing activities.

Finally, we note the lack of information received on activities in the field of ballistic missiles designed to be capable of carrying nuclear weapons. We will remain vigilant about the continuation by Iran of any such activity, contrary to resolution 2231 (2015), and the spirit of the Vienna agreement, and contradicting the objective of consolidating regional stability.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the need to maintain our collective commitment to ensuring the long-term implementation of all the provisions of the Vienna agreement and of resolution 2231 (2015) in the same spirit of cooperation that favoured the conclusion of the agreement. The continuation of the diplomatic success that the conclusion of the Vienna agreement and the adoption of resolution 2231 (2015) represent requires strict and transparent compliance in the long term with all their provisions. France will therefore remain vigilant and will contribute to the vigilance of the Security Council throughout the process.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for presenting the second report (S/2016/1136) of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015). We note the productive start to the work of the Security Council's new facilitator on the implementation of the resolution, the Permanent Representative of Italy, Mr. Sebastiano Cardi. We are also grateful to the Permanent Representative of Spain for the important work that he undertook previously on this very important resolution.

We highlight once again that the report of the Secretary-General used less unsubstantiated data and unverified information from the media that could not be checked or confirmed than the first report (see S/2016/589). The new report has become more fact-based, impartial and neutral than the first. However, the text continues to include some elements that can raise serious questions. There are also repetitions, creating artificial emphasis.

The main shortcoming of the report is that the Secretariat ignored Tehran's wishes to include in it information on the actual problems related to meeting sanctions-lifting obligations in the framework of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). As in the first report, we note a clear slant towards issues of implementing annex B aimed at maintaining limits on the Islamic Republic of Iran. The result is a one-sided and equivocal report.

Although the report is submitted pursuant to resolution 2231 (2015), the references made in it are only to annex B, which is actually a separate statement of the

5+1 group. Let us not forget that, on 16 January 2016, the Security Council drew up a special note instructing the Secretary-General to submit reports. The note refers to the entire resolution 2231 (2015), and not to separate parts of it, in particular annex B. We suggest that, if there are any doubts or questions about the scope, the structure or individual elements of the report, then the Secretary-General can, and must, approach the Security Council for appropriate clarifications.

Furthermore, that procedure has already been used by the Secretary-General, as reported in the report, with regard to the issue of the temporary removal of conventional weapons that are subject to restriction. We call upon the Secretary-General to monitor the respect for paragraph 27 of resolution 2231 (2015), which clearly emphasizes the non-precedent-setting nature of the provisions of the JCPOA, given that there have been attempts to use the exclusive agreements in the JCPOA in other contexts. A number of non-governmental organizations have been trying to promote ways in which the JCPOA could be used to enhance the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) safeguards system and advance nuclear disarmament. Such arbitrary actions must be monitored.

As before, we continue to call for a change in the conceptual approach to the preparation of the report, which presents all information in a negative tone. First and foremost, the document should help to establish and enhance conditions that would lead to a successful and lasting implementation of the JCPOA, which would be the most important diplomatic achievement.

The Russian Federation is generally satisfied with the results that have been achieved in the year since the start of the implementation of the JCPOA. The working mechanisms of the Joint Commission have started functioning and have been working satisfactorily. In our view, the Commission is effectively addressing emerging issues.

We believe that Iran is fully complying with its obligations, which is reflected in the report of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The occasional technical problems that have emerged are being addressed effectively, and the most recent clear example of that is the approval by the Joint Commission of the decision regarding the clean-up of the production line at the Isfahan plant and the handling of enriched uranium. In the long term, the procedure developed will allow us to address the issue of Tehran's compliance with the established limit of 300 kilogrammes for stocks of such material.

We advocate against any attempts to exert pressure on Tehran in the area of its missile and conventional weapons programmes. Any threats in that area affecting the lifting of unilateral sanctions and Iran's return to the international economic and financial markets are unacceptable and counter-productive.

We would like to address an element contained in the report — the request of the Secretary-General to the Security Council to clarify the issue of the temporary transfer of conventional weapons. We are ready to participate actively in preparing and providing an adequate reply to the Secretary-General. We believe that the temporary removal of conventional weapons does not fall under the scope of annex B.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China would like to thank you, Sir, for convening today's meeting. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman, Ambassador Cardi and Ambassador Vale de Almeida for their briefings.

The implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) during the first year has registered good progress overall. At the sixth Joint Commission meeting of the JCPOA, everyone gave a positive assessment of the implementation of the Plan of Action, exchanged views on the lifting of sanctions and on nuclear issues in an earnest and in-depth manner and committed to the continuous implementation of the JCPOA.

China has taken note of the reports submitted by Secretary-General Guterres (S/2016/1136) and Ambassador Cardi (see S/2017/49) as the facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), and appreciates the efforts that have gone into the drafting of those reports. The reports provide an accurate reflection of the implementation efforts made by the parties concerned. It is of critical importance to send a positive signal that all parties are committed to the implementation of the resolution and the JCPOA. China has taken note of Iran's legitimate concerns with regard to the content of the reports. China appreciates the efforts by Iran to implement the JCPOA and hopes that the legitimate concerns of Iran will be duly reflected.

China also acknowledges the recent report (see S/2016/1113) by the Joint Commission to Security Council on the work of the Procurement Working Group and will continue to participate actively in the work of both the Commission and the Working Group. Since the JCPOA is not being implemented in a vacuum, there will be difficulties and challenges along the way, and joint efforts will be required. First, all parties should reaffirm their political will and eliminate external interference, so as to be able to stay the course in the implementation. Secondly, the parties should honour their commitments, in strict accordance with the JCPOA, which provides the fundamental guidelines for action. Thirdly, they should demonstrate goodwill and properly address technical divergences through consultations, on an equal footing, in the quest for a long-term, sustainable solution. Only in so doing can the implementation of JCPOA be successful and lasting.

China has always advocated for the settlement of the Iran nuclear issue by political and diplomatic means and is dedicated to the strengthening of the international nuclear non-proliferation system and the maintenance of international and regional peace and stability. As an active participant, promoter and contributor in the process to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue, China supports and safeguards the historic achievement of the JCPOA, and will continue to work with all parties to promote the sustained, comprehensive and effective implementation of the JCPOA.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I join with others in paying tribute to and thanking Ambassador Samantha Power for the tireless dedication with which she has tackled the numerous difficulties that the world faces. It has indeed been a pleasure working with Ambassador Power, even if for only six months in my case.

I would like to thank the three briefers for their detailed reports on this important topic.

Two days ago, we marked the first anniversary of efforts to commence the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and the launch of meetings on resolution 2231 (2015) at the Security Council. We are encouraged by the very positive statements made by JCPOA members over the past few days and today, reaffirming their strong commitment to respect and implement the agreement. Japan fully agrees on the importance of implementing the JCPOA and resolution 2231 (2015), and will continue to strongly support both.

One of the most visible examples of the support we provide to the implementation of the JCPOA is our cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which verifies and monitors that Iran's nuclear programme is being used exclusively for peaceful purposes. Japan has announced that it will provide assistance through the IAEA for the purposes of implementing nuclear safety and safeguards commitments. The IAEA is playing an invaluable role in that regard, and we offer our full support.

The international community has wholeheartedly backed the implementation of the nuclear- and JCPOA-related elements of resolution 2231 (2015). In addition, the Council is also responsible for closely monitoring the implementation of the provisions of annex B of the resolution. Japan commends the efforts of the Secretariat to provide an objective and comprehensive report on that area. We are aware of some alleged cases that may contravene the provisions of annex B, in particular regarding the arms and travel bans. We encourage the Secretariat to continue to examine those cases. The Council should utilize tools such as the Yemen Sanctions Committee and Somalia Sanctions Committee to obtain the relevant information. As the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014), I am pleased to cooperate with the facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), the Secretariat and other bodies.

Possible contraventions of the arms and travel bans are particularly serious, because they have both direct and indirect impacts on the regional situation. Japan believes that one of the most significant by-products of the JCPOA is its potential to contribute to peace and security in the Middle East. We believe that Iran can, and should, play a constructive role in addressing the difficult situations in Syria and Yemen. The Council is responsible for closely monitoring the situation and taking appropriate measures as necessary in order to prevent actions that could undermine the stability of the region.

A significant achievement of resolution 2231 (2015) during the past six months was achieving the full functionality of the procurement channel for processing nuclear-related proposals. Japan appreciates the efforts of the facilitator and the Secretariat to make the mechanism useful and transparent for all Member States, thereby ensuring the necessary information security and confidentiality. We will continue to support work under the resolution 2231 (2015) format in that regard.

Many of us today have welcomed the steady implementation of the JCPOA and resolution 2231 (2015), and we hope to see the participation of the delegation of Iran in future meetings. Japan is committed to working closely with Council members, JCPOA members and Iran, both individually and collectively, so as to enable the most effective possible implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I would like to begin by adding my sincerest words of thanks and paying tribute to our colleague Ambassador Samantha Power. I thank her for the opportunity and privilege to work with her over the past year. I appreciate that we were able to work so closely. I thank her for her convictions and strong stand for justice. That is not to be forgotten. As in Italian, in Ukrainian we say, "see you soon". I hope very much to see her soon again.

I would like to thank all three briefers for providing factual and substantial reports on the status of the implementation of both resolution 2231 (2015) and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as well as for giving a detailed presentation on the work conducted in that area over the past six months.

In that regard, I would like to point out that in December 2016 Ukraine submitted to the facilitator its national report on steps undertaken last year to bring its legal framework into compliance with resolution 2231 (2015). Ukraine joins others in welcoming implementation day on 16 January 2016, which we believe marks a new stage in the Iranian nuclear issue and in the promotion of peace and security in the region. We highly commend the concerted efforts of the Secretariat, the European Commission, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the facilitator's team to ensure the full and proper implementation of the JCPOA and resolution 2231 (2015). Those instruments have provided a platform of convergence for the common interests of the international community and have contributed to strengthening the non-proliferation regime, in general.

As a staunch supporter of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Ukraine stresses the importance of full and faithful compliance with that crucial treaty, which aims at striking a balance between the legitimate right to develop nuclear energy and the need to stem the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The JCPOA fully respects such a balance. We welcome the detailed IAEA reports on the implementation of Iran's nuclear-related commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, including heavy-water restrictions. We support the Agency's role in the verification and monitoring of the use of nuclear material and technologies exclusively for peaceful purposes. The provisional application by Iran of the Additional Protocol Additional to the Safeguards Agreement between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency and Teheran's compliance with the transparency measures set out in the JCPOA significantly contribute to the sustainable implementation of the entire agreement.

Over the past six months, we have witnessed the smooth and effective functioning of the procurement channel mechanism, with the approval of several proposals to supply the relevant goods and technologies to Iran. We welcome that no actions were carried out in contravention of the ballistic missile-related provisions of annex B to resolution 2231 (2015) during the reporting period, as the Secretary-General indicated.

At the same time, we share concerns relating to the incidents involving the seizure of conventional arms, allegedly originating in Iran, that were likely bound for conflict zones. We fully support the intention of the Secretary-General to continue examining those cases and obtain additional information. The incidents of non-compliance with the travel ban stipulated by resolution 2231 (2015) jeopardize its successful implementation as well.

Having stressed the imperative of full compliance with the relevant obligations, Ukraine reiterates the importance for all parties engaged in the process to interact constructively to resolve outstanding issues for the sake of the hard-won non-proliferation deal. Its proper and diligent implementation represents a key contribution to regional and global security and stability. We call on all stake-holders involved to ensure that the concerns raised in the reports of the Secretary-General (S/2016/1136) and the facilitator (see S/2017/49) are not allowed to lead to further disputes; they should rather be duly considered and resolved through constructive dialogue.

Proceeding from what I have just stated, and taking into account the current tense situation in the Middle East, it is important to further raise public awareness on the progress achieved since the entry into force of this historic nuclear agreement. That is even more important at this juncture when we are about to enter a new cycle of Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conferences.

To conclude, I reiterate the significance of unity in the Council's stance when dealing with this sensitive issue and its determination to ensure the further implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador João Vale de Almeida and Ambassador Sebastiano Cardi for their respective briefings on the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and resolution 2231 (2015).

Of course, I endorse everything that you said before the meeting, Mr. President, with regard to Ambassador Samantha Power. Whether one loves or hates her, one will never be misled by her. What you see is what you get. There is no duplicity in Samantha Power. That is a great quality that is not abundantly present in the world. I wish her and her family long life and success.

The Iranian nuclear deal represents, as Under-Secretary-General Feltman said, a significant achievement of multilateralism and diplomacy in addressing one of the most pressing peace and security issues of our time. One year since implementation day, the Security Council should be encouraged by the progress made in the implementation of the landmark JCPOA agreement, which contributes much to the strengthening of the non-proliferation regime and the promotion of international peace and security.

In that connection, we take note of the key findings and recommendation of the Secretary-General contained in his second biannual report (S/2016/1136) on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015). Most notably, as others have indicated — and it is worth repeating — no information has been received during the past six months with regard to actions inconsistent with resolution 2231 (2015), in particular as it pertains to the supply, sale, transfer or export of nuclear-related items, ballistic missile activity, or ballistic missile-related transfers, as well as asset-freeze violations. That is indeed a positive development, clearly indicating that the implementation of the agreement is firmly on course.

The Islamic Republic of Iran and the participating countries deserve to be commended for demonstrating strong commitment under the JCPOA framework. Of course, we understand the challenges and difficulties that may be encountered in implementation, and that is only natural. However, it is absolutely critical that all participants continue to display the same spirit of cooperation in order to address this challenge and preserve the agreement so as to achieve the desired objectives. Here I would like to echo something that Ambassador Vale de Almeida said in his briefing:

> "The work we have undertaken so far has proven that it is possible to reach agreements even on the most contentious issues and to implement them, provided that there is a will to do so."

As the Secretary-General's report indicates, there are some issues that could lead to ambiguities and different interpretations of the provisions of resolution 2231 (2015) on the JCPOA. In that regard, explanations such as that provided by the Joint Commission on the temporary transfer of nuclear weapons are necessary in order to clear up misunderstandings and avoid any possible obstacles to full implementation of the agreement. The close cooperation and working relationship between the Joint Commission and the Security Council with regard to the procurement channel is important. The continued cooperation of the International Atomic Energy Agency with the Islamic Republic of Iran and the JCPOA-participating States will also continue to be critical to the full implementation of the nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA and to the broader implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

Lastly, we are concerned about the information provided by France about the seizure of arms shipments that were probably destined for Yemen or Somalia, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report. We therefore hope that the necessary investigation will be carried out in order to verify the information and that the Council will be briefed about the outcome in due course.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Feltman, Mr. Cardi and Mr. Vale de Almeida for their briefings, and Ambassador Oyarzun Marchesi of Spain for the work he led last year. The information they have given us shows that the issue has positive aspects, challenges and also some areas of concern.

Uruguay is firmly committed to non-proliferation and to strengthening the nuclear disarmament regime. We do not possess nuclear weapons and we are a member of the world's first nuclear-weapon-free zone under the Treaty of Tlatelolco and its counterpart organization in Latin America, the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as a party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We were pleased and optimistic about the signing in Vienna in 2015 of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear programme.

Exactly one year later, after the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had verified that Iran had complied with the initial provisions of the agreement, during Uruguay's presidency of the Council, we reached the starting date for implementation, marking another important milestone in the process, a key achievement for non-proliferation and a significant contribution to international peace, security and stability that eliminates one of the main sources of tension in the troubled region of the Middle East.

The steps taken by Iran and the other parties to the agreement showed that positive results can be achieved with political will and diplomacy, even in cases where they seem distant prospects. We appreciate the IAEA's confirmation that so far Iran has been fulfilling the provisions of the agreement. At the same time, we are concerned about the criticisms in the report regarding Iran's possible violation of the provisions of annex B to resolution 2231 (2015). In that regard, while we are grateful for Iran's detailed report on its compliance with that annex, in the future we would also like to know the degree of its compliance with other aspects of the resolution, including annex A. Uruguay urges all the parties to the agreement to take all the necessary measures stipulated in resolution 2231 (2015) and to comply with its provisions in order not to jeopardize a historic agreement that was the result of more than two years of intense negotiations. In that regard, we encourage the parties to act with restraint and caution and to refrain from taking any action that runs counter to the agreement. The Security Council, as a guarantor of international peace and security, should oversee its full compliance.

(spoke in English)

I would like to express my good wishes to the lady sitting on my right, whom I will miss. It has been a pleasure working with Ms. Power — whether we have been in agreement or disagreement, it has always been a pleasure and an enriching experience to listen to her arguments, but mostly to be touched by the fire and passion that she always puts into her statements. I wish her all the very best. In Spanish we often say adiós, but we also often say hasta pronto — see you soon.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation would like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General and the Secretariat for preparing this important report (S/2016/1136) on monitoring the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), on Iran. I would also like to welcome my friend and colleague Ambassador Sebastiano Cardi as facilitator for the resolution's implementation and to wish him every success.

Egypt would like to emphasize the importance of Iran's continued compliance with its obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and related Security Council resolutions. The Security Council and the relevant international organizations must continue to carry out their responsibilities regarding verification of Iran's compliance with its commitments in the area of nuclear and missile activities, as well as other activities covered under the Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2231 (2015), on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

We would also like to stress how seriously we take Iran's suspected continuing illegal arms trafficking in the Middle East, its role in fuelling some of the conflicts in the region and its sponsorship of terrorism, all of them activities that destabilize the region. They are a violation of United Nations principles, first and foremost the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States. They also run counter to the neighbourly relations that we wish all countries in the region would commit to so that we can achieve the stability we want, paving the way for constructive dialogue.

In that context, we should once again reiterate the resolutions of the League of Arab States on Iran's conduct in the region, particularly the importance of reaching a settlement on the three Emirati islands and addressing Iran's interference in the internal affairs of Arab States, as well as its conduct, which has a clearly sectarian attitude that tends to exacerbate the tension, division and violence that are already widespread in the Middle East.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I would like to say at the outset, Mr. President, that my delegation fully associates itself with the very apt words you expressed prior to the beginning of this meeting in paying well-deserved tribute to Ambassador Samantha Power as she prepares to leave the Chamber and her work as Permanent Representative of the United States. Ambassador Power has served her country with dedication and on every occasion found the energy necessary to advance the Council's work, including on issues related to Africa. We wish her good luck.

I should like to thank Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman; Ambassador De Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; and Ambassador Sebastiano Cardi, Permanent Representative of Italy and facilitator of the implementation of resolution 2231(2015), for their briefings.

By endorsing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in resolution 2231 (2015) on 20 July 2015, the Security Council confirmed the agreement on the Iranian nuclear issue, which enshrines the completion of 12 years of diplomatic efforts on the part of the United States of America, Russia, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, China,the European Union and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2016/1136), which we are discussing today and which is the second of its kind established in accordance with the provisions set out in annex B to that resolution, comprehensively describes the provisions relating to nuclear issues and ballistic missiles, travel bans, the freezing of assets and measures taken to promote the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

With regard to nuclear-related provisions, the report clearly indicates that the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to fulfil its obligations, as outlined in the last two quarterly reports published by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in September and November on its verification and monitoring activities in that country, as well as the monitoring of Iran's implementation of its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA.

In addition, we welcome the five new nuclear proposals submitted under the procurement channel, three of which have already been approved by the Security Council. This clearly confirms the effectiveness of the cooperation between our Council and the Joint Commission set up under the JCPOA. The interface thus constituted between the members of the Security Council and the Joint Commission is functioning well, thereby ensuring visibility, inclusiveness and transparency. Similarly, no activity or transfer of ballistic missiles by Iran has been reported in the report, thereby reinforcing compliance with the provisions of the resolution by that country.

However, mention is made once again of a transfer of arms from the Islamic Republic of Iran, in violation of the provisions of annex B to resolution 2231 (2015). We are awaiting more information from the Secretariat concerning the origin of these weapons. Moreover, the Senegalese delegation is concerned about indications that Iran is supplying weapons to Hizbullah.

With regard to the freezing of assets and travel bans, we urge the parties to respect these provisions while the Council continues to work on delisting the remaining 36 entities and persons.

With regard to the efforts of the Secretariat and the facilitator in the implementation of resolution 2231, including the practical information provided on the procurement channel, we can say that they deserve all our support and cooperation. Indeed, thanks to an informative website and awareness-raising activities, Member States have access to the information necessary to fulfil their obligations properly, in particular the follow-up of actions deemed not to comply with resolution 2231 (2015), the procurement channel, confidentiality, notifications and exemptions, not to mention issues of transparency and popularization.

I should like to conclude by noting that the Senegalese delegation is of the opinion that the annual review of the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) is generally positive and encourages the facilitator, all stakeholders in the JCPOA and the States Members of the United Nations to persevere in this direction.

Mr. Sadykov (Kazakhstan): At the outset, I should like to join our colleagues in paying tribute to Ambassador Samantha Power for her dedication, commitment and contribution to peace and security. We wish her every success in her future endeavours.

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman, European Union observer De Almeida and Permanent Representative of Italy Sebastiano Cardi for their briefings.

Our gratitude also goes to the Security Council secretariat for its support to the Council in implementing resolution 2231 (2015).

My country has always supported the process of international negotiations on the Iranian nuclear programme and made a practical contribution to it. Two rounds of talks on this matter in Kazakhstan in 2013 contributed to creating an atmosphere of trust and confidence that facilitated further fruitful rounds of negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran, and paved the way for the agreement. As part of the agreement, in 2015 and 2016 Kazakhstan supplied Iran with natural uranium on commercial terms in compensation for the removal of low-enriched uranium from that country, as specified in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). We are ready and willing to continue our supply, if necessary, in accordance with the requirements of resolution 2231 (2015) and other documents related to the Iranian nuclear programme.

For the past thee years, Kazakhstan has contributed $650,000 to the Nuclear Security Fund of the International Atomic Energy Agency, some of which have been allocated to support monitoring and verification activities in Iran in relation to the Joint Plan of Action.

As noted in the second report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/1136), over the past year there has been no report of Iranian violations of the provisions of annex B to resolution 2231 (2015). In this regard, we commend the strong commitment of Iran to complying with resolution 2231 (2015) and the JCPOA, which is very important to the further implementation of the Agreement.

At the same time, we note that in the past reporting period only five additional nuclear-related proposals have been submitted through the procurement channel, three of which were approved by the Security Council. These statistics, in our view, suggest the need to maintain ongoing transparency, with practical guidance and outreach as a priority. That is important in view of the need for a proper understanding and implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

Implementing the JCPOA has had a significant impact on normalizing the situation in the region as a whole. The JCPOA will have a positive effect on the revitalization of economic activity in the region. In that context, the expansion of economic relations between Iran and regional countries, including the Central Asian States, will promote business activity and economic development in the region. As evidence of this, I would cite the mutual visits of the heads of Kazakhstan and Iran in the past year. In April 2016, President of Kazakhstan Nazarbayev paid a visit to Tehran, which resulted in 51 commercial agreements and contracts worth more than $1 billion. In December 2016, Iranian President Rouhani made a return visit to Astana, during which further agreements were reached to strengthen mutually beneficial trade, economic and investment cooperation. Kazakhstan, as a land-locked country, gained the opportunity to enter the world markets and export its products with the launch of the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway. Thus, the JCPOA has brought positive changes and, consequently, the revival of economic relations among the countries of the region.

In conclusion, I wish to underline that Kazakhstan will continue to support and to implement strictly resolution 2231 (2015), and express the readiness of my Government to cooperate with Iran in the framework of implementing the JCPOA.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia): At the outset, I wish to join my colleagues in wishing Ms. Samantha Power and her family happiness, peace and love.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

Allow me to express the gratitude of my delegation for the report presented by Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, the statement made by the Head of the Delegation of the European Union, Mr. João Vale de Almeida, as well as for the report presented by the Permanent Representative of Italy, Mr. Sebastiano Cardi, as facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — which was negotiated by Germany, China, the United States of America, the Russian Federation, France, the United Kingdom, the High Representative of the European Union and the Islamic Republic of Iran — was adopted on 14 July 2015. On 20 July, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2231 (2015), in which it endorsed the JCPOA. The Security Council affirmed that the implementation of the Plan of Action would contribute to building trust in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme and highlighted the fact that the Plan promotes and facilitates the normal development of cooperation and economic and trade contacts with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

That moment in recent history represented a qualitative step forward when compared to other conflicts facing humankind. As such, it was doubtlessly a victory for multilateralism over unilateralism. It was a victory for the respect of the equality of all United Nations Member States over interventionism. It was a victory for negotiation over compulsion. It was a victory of diplomacy against the use of force, and a clear illustration that diplomacy cannot and should not be entrenched in fixed positions. Instead, diplomacy should help us to build bridges, encourage rapprochement and identify mutual interests that allow us to resolve our disputes peacefully.

As has been expressed here today, it was not only the fact that we reached this agreement that fills us with a deep sense of satisfaction and hope, but the implementation of the agreement as well. Iran — and we should all recognize this — has met its obligations. In addition, the United Nations, the European Union and the United States have lifted sanctions related to the matter.

The International Atomic Energy Agency has asked the Security Council to undertake the necessary verification and monitoring of Iran's fulfilment of its obligations in the nuclear sphere with regard to the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) (see S/2016/589). Allow me to point out that I do this not only in my capacity as Permanent Representative of Bolivia, but also as a member of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, a nuclear-weapon-free zone. We hope to soon see the day when the Middle East in its entirety will also be a zone declared free of nuclear weapons. And we have not given up on the dream that our entire planet will one day be free of these weapons, which represent a serious threat, not only to international peace and security, but also to the very survival of our species and Mother Earth.

The report presented today pursuant to the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) shows progress in the review of each case, and encourages us to ensure that each review is independent, impartial, comprehensive and conclusive, based on reliable information, and its results duly verified. We are of the view that when additional information is required, the Secretariat should use all the necessary sources of information so that it can include in its report those cases that have been brought to its attention. We highlight that the aforesaid is aimed only at contributing to the continuity of the work undertaken by the Secretary-General with regard to the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

In conclusion, we believe it vital that the next report to be submitted to this body deal with the provisions of annexes A and B of resolution 2231 (2015).

Mr. Cardi (Italy) (*spoke in French*): I shall speak in my national capacity.

Since its conclusion, Italy has considered the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to be proof of how diplomacy can effectively lead to a solution to issues related to nuclear non-proliferation. In particular, the JCPOA has been set up with a robust and comprehensive structure, supported by a solid verification mechanism, which is crucial to upholding mutual trust and the credibility of the Plan. For that reason, Italy will continue to strongly support the International Atomic Energy Agency in its verification and monitoring duties. In that respect, Italy commends the Agency for the work it has done to date and the productive dialogue it has held with all stakeholders. Italy also commends the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, for her leadership as Coordinator of the Joint Commission established by the JCPOA.

Two days after the first anniversary of implementation day, it is clear that the mechanism effectively contributes to global security. The implementation of the JCPOA and of resolution 2231 (2015) has advanced very significantly thus far. We trust that all the parties will continue to respect their commitments and the spirit of the agreement in good faith. Only good faith implementation of the JCPOA and of resolution 2231 (2015) will contribute to regional and international peace and security.

We encourage all stakeholders to continue to promptly resolve any potential issues through dialogue, using all the relevant mechanisms set up by the JCPOA. Of course, the Security Council has a key role in this process, and Italy will do its part to facilitate the smooth implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), taking the excellent work done by my predecessor, Ambassador Román Oyarzun Marchesi, as an example.

In conclusion, we believe that in coming years the international community should continue to ensure that the JCPOA yields benefits for all and that it maintains its central role in the global effort against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Sweden.

Sweden warmly welcomed the agreement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2015. It is a victory for diplomacy and a prime example of peaceful dispute resolution and conflict prevention. Its successful implementation benefits both stability in the region and international peace and security. We call on all parties to fully honour their commitments and to build on the momentum provided by the agreement.

Sweden welcomes the report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/1136), which finds that implementation, overall, is on track. We commend the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for its compliance with its nuclear-related obligations, as evidenced by the reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The fact that there has been no information indicating activities in contravention of restrictions regarding ballistic missile activity and related technology is welcome. It is also promising that the procurement channel process is working, in line with the agreement.

Despite the generally positive picture regarding implementation, a number of areas for concern remain, however.

First, we are concerned about reports of arms transfers, alleged to have originated in Iran, having taken place. All supply, sale or transfer of arms or related materials from Iran must be authorized on a case-by-case basis by the Security Council.

Secondly, there have been reported contraventions of the travel ban. Only the Security Council can determine when such travel is justified, and all countries must meet their obligations to prevent entry and transit through their territories of individuals on the list maintained pursuant to resolution 2231 (2015).

Sweden calls on the Government of Iran to formally respond to the reports of activities undertaken contrary to the provisions of annex B to the resolution identified in the Secretary-General's report. We stress the importance of the Secretary-General receiving all the necessary information, including the opportunity to examine specific seizures of arms suspected to have originated in Iran. A close dialogue between Iran and the Secretary-General and between Iran and the facilitator is instrumental in that regard. A crucial confidence-building measure would be early ratification by Iran of the Additional Protocol.

The historic agreement is one of the major diplomatic achievements of the past decade. Successful implementation requires the long-term commitment of all parties, based on mutual trust and respect. I hope we can all work towards that end.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Braun (Germany): Germany would like to thank today's briefers and the Secretary-General for his second report on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2016/1136), introduced by Under-Secretary-General Feltman at this meeting. Let me briefly make three points.

First, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), endorsed by resolution 2231 (2015), is an outstanding success of diplomacy in an extremely volatile region. It is a thoughtful agreement building on and strengthening the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. One year into the implementation of the JCPOA, there is no doubt that the deal is working. All participants have been keeping their commitments. That contributes to security and stability in the region. All participants to the agreement will now need to adhere to the JCPOA for its full duration in order to ensure its continued success.

Secondly, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has to date verified in four reports that Iran is abiding by its nuclear-related commitment — and I stress nuclear-related. Going ahead, verification and monitoring by the IAEA will remain essential to re-establishing trust and confidence and to reassuring the world that Iran's nuclear programme serves exclusively peaceful purposes. The easing of sanctions has brought considerable economic progress to Iran over the past 12 months. Just two indicators are the fact that gross domestic product has grown by 4.5 per cent and the conclusion of substantial business contracts, among them by Boeing and Airbus. That is a powerful and encouraging signal.

We are confident that the people of Iran are now beginning to reap the benefit of Iran's return to international trade and growth. At the same time, we all know that economic consolidation and growth take time. The full and comprehensive implementation of the JCPOA provides the basis for that to happen. It is a precondition for confidence to also grow in the business community. Germany remains committed to the goal of re-establishing full economic ties with Iran to the benefit of all parties concerned.

Thirdly, Germany welcomes the fact that the procurement channel has become fully operational. We thank Spain for its important role in that regard. We look forward to continuing the excellent cooperation with the Security Council via the new facilitator, Italy.

The Vienna agreement and resolution 2231 (2015) are a victory for the principles of the United Nations. The JCPOA negotiations show the power of persistent multilateral diplomacy to address major international challenges. Germany is proud to be a party to the JCPOA and remains firmly committed to its continued and full implementation.

With your permission, Mr. President, I would also like to take this opportunity to wish our colleague, Ambassador Samantha Power, also on behalf of the non-members of the Security Council, godspeed in her future endeavours, and good luck to all of us in the future without her at this table. Samantha will be missed.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.

United Nations

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Provisional

Security Council

Seventy-second year

7866th meeting

Thursday, 19 January 2017, 1 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Skoog	(Sweden)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Coleman
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

Peace consolidation in West Africa

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The meeting was called to order at 1.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Peace consolidation in West Africa

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2017/55, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Senegal.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements before the voting.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, my delegation would like to convey the heartfelt congratulations of the Government of Senegal to His Excellency Mr. Adama Barrow, President of the Republic of The Gambia, who has just officially assumed office following the oath-taking ceremony that took place in the Embassy of The Gambia in Dakar. The ceremony took place in the presence, inter alia, of the Senegalese authorities; the diplomatic corps accredited to Senegal, including ambassadors of Security Council members; and Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel.

In this regard, we welcome the joint communiqué issued by the United Nations, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) at the conclusion of the ceremony, thereby strengthening the united approach that had consistently prevailed in the management of this issue. Senegal takes this opportunity to express its full gratitude to the international community for its unwavering support and firmness, which led to this outcome.

The draft resolution before us, submitted by the Senegalese delegation, is part and parcel of the ongoing diplomatic and political efforts of ECOWAS, the African Union and the United Nations to find a solution to the post-electoral situation in the sisterly Islamic Republic of The Gambia. In Senegal, we say that Gambia is more than our neighbour. Senegal, as a State of the region, therefore thanks all members of the Security Council for their support for and solidarity with the efforts of ECOWAS and the African Union to overcome the attempt to usurp the will of the sovereign people of The Gambia, democratically expressed on 1 December 2016. In that regard, I must stress the appeal made today by President Adama Barrow to the international community, and in particular ECOWAS, the African Union and the United Nations, to help ensure respect for the sovereign will of the people of The Gambia.

In the light of all I have said, the Senegalese delegation calls on all Council members to vote unanimously in favour of the draft resolution before us.

The President: The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2337 (2017).

I shall now call on those members of the Council who wish to make statements following the voting.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Uruguay thanks Senegal for its efforts within the Council and in Africa with respect to the situation in The Gambia.

However, as a member of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, I note that we should have preferred the negotiating process on resolution 2337 (2017), which we have just adopted, had been undertaken in a more inclusive manner. The resolution was circulated on Tuesday evening, with only a brief window for comments and without face-to-face negotiations, and was then put to a brief silence procedure before being issued in blue, which did not allow the various legitimate concerns expressed by Council members to be taken into account. Moreover, it was not made available in all official languages of the United Nations. Uruguay recognizes that the Security Council had to act urgently and take a timely decision in this instance, but that does not justify the failure to open the process to the dialogue and inclusiveness required when negotiating any draft resolution.

Uruguay, as a champion of the rule of law, democracy and the the freedom of expression, expresses its support for the will of the Gambian people, expressed in the elections of 1 December 2016. In that regard, we were alarmed by the measures adopted by former President Jammeh, which represented a violation of the Constitution that threatened peace in the The Gambia and regional stability, and gave rise to the need for the resolution we have just adopted.

Uruguay reiterates its position, pursuant to Article 53 of the Charter of the United Nations, that no enforcement action shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without the authorization of the Security Council. Such authorization must be express, affirmative and prior. Uruguay underscores that nothing in resolution 2337 (2017) can be interpreted as express authorization of the use of force.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian delegation voted in favour of resolution 2337 (2017) on the situation in The Gambia on the basis of the need to ensure the peaceful transfer of power in the country and avoid bloodshed and further destabilization. We also voted in support of the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union to unblock the post-electoral crisis through peaceful means.

We highly appreciate the mediation efforts of these organizations, as well as the countries of the region and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa. We hope that the joint efforts will help to maintain peace and order in The Gambia. Russia recognized the election results of 1 December 2016, and from the very outset of the crisis has advocated a search through exclusively peaceful means to resolve it and to safeguard the security of its citizens and respect for their fundamental rights and freedoms in accordance with universally recognized democratic norms. We note the flexibility shown by the sponsors of the resolution, aimed at finding the necessary consensus in the Council.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia takes the floor to recognize the work undertaken by Senegal and of subregional and regional organizations with respect to the issue at hand. We also draw attention to our belief that the negotiating process was regrettably hasty. We understand the urgency of the situation, but we believe that prior negotiations could have facilitated a better exchange of views and improved the text of resolution 2337 (2017), which we adopted today.

Pursuant to the first preambular paragraph of the resolution, we are committed to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and unity of The Islamic Republic of The Gambia. Bolivia believes that we must continue to pursue mediation efforts and good offices to identify a peaceful solution to this problem. We do not feel that at this stage this situation poses a threat to international peace and security. Bolivia therefore believes that the adoption of the resolution cannot and should not be interpreted to represent Security Council support for or endorsement of the use of force. To that end, we would need a specific resolution providing such a mandate or endorsing such action.

Mr. Wilson (United Kingdom): I join others in welcoming the unanimous adoption of resolution 2337 (2017). I commend Senegal for its swift and decisive action in presenting the text of resolution 2337 (2017) today.

But in truth, the Council should not have to do this. The people of The Gambia spoke clearly at the elections in December. They chose Adama Barrow to be their President. Their voice now needs to be heard, and their will needs to be heeded by just one man.

Resolution 2237 (2017) is clear: former President Jammeh must respect the decision of the Gambian people and immediately hand over power. His failure to do so up until this point is only bringing uncertainty to the people of The Gambia. Despite this setback, the Gambian people have shown admirable restraint and stoicism by remaining calm in the face of uncertainty. They have given former President Jammeh time to consider the many options that are open to him. We look to all parties in The Gambia, particularly the security forces, to continue to act with restraint and to maintain that calm.

We welcome the work of the Economic Community of West African States to resolve this. At a time of unease in The Gambia, it is reassuring to see effective regional leadership on display. Mr. Jammeh has been given many opportunities by his neighbours and partners and, most important, by the Gambian people themselves. It is now time for him to do the right thing.

Mr. Shen Bo (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China voted in favour of resolution 2337 (2017). China has been following the developments in The Gambia since its presidential elections. We call on the parties concerned in the country to remain calm, to put the interests of the country and of the people first and to resolve the ongoing political crisis appropriately, through dialogue and political consultation, in order to maintain peace and stability in The Gambia.

China has been consistently supportive of Africans settling African issues in the African way, and commends the positive efforts of regional and subregional organizations, such as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States, to help address Gambian issues through good offices and mediation. China supports the countries and organizations concerned in their efforts to bring their respective influence to bear; to step up good offices and mediation efforts; and to continue to encourage the parties to move towards a proper solution of the Gambian issue, and thereby contributing to regional peace and stability.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): Kazakhstan welcomes the adoption today of resolution 2337 (2017), on the situation in The Gambia. We thank Senegal for its efforts to find consensus on the resolution. Kazakhstan commends the tireless mediation efforts of the Presidents of Nigeria, Liberia, Ghana and Mauritania, as well as the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and other stakeholders. Kazakhstan voted in favour of resolution 2337 (2017) for the following reasons.

First, we believe that it is important to respect the will of the people of The Gambia, as expressed in the result of the election last month. Kazakhstan is committed to peace and long-term stability in The Gambia so that its people can freely enjoy their rights and freedoms.

Secondly, the Security Council should seize the opportunity to send a clear message to the Government and people of The Gambia, as well as to the international community, that the United Nations is closely engaged and requests all stakeholders, including the Gambian defence and security forces, to exercise restraint. That message is also to encourage all stakeholders to prevent any steps that could lead to possible violence in the country.

Finally, with this resolution we call for a demonstration of wisdom, responsibility and political will to effectively resolve the current crisis and ensure the peaceful and orderly transfer of power to President Adama Barrow.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): Japan welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2337 (2017). Japan strongly condemns the refusal by Mr. Jammeh to transfer power to President Barrow, against the will of the Gambian people, which was demonstrated in the presidential election last December. Japan highly commends the strenuous mediation efforts undertaken by subregional and regional actors, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union to bring about a peaceful and smooth transition of power to avoid a crisis.

By unanimously adopting resolution 2337 (2017) today, the Security Council is sending a clear message to Mr. Jammeh to carry out a peaceful and orderly transition of power to President Barrow. He should do so immediately. The Council should work together with ECOWAS and the African Union to prevent any aggravation of the situation.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2337 (2017). My delegation thanks Senegal warmly for its leadership. From the beginning, France supported the efforts led by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its African partners.

The 1 December elections in The Gambia were carried out in a way that is beyond reproach. They illustrate a phenonemon that may be commonplace elsewhere, but that is nonetheless extraordinary in West Africa. Democratic governance and respect for the will of the people are now taken for granted — a situation that none would wish to reverse. Last year, six of the 10 elections in the region led to a transition in power. Elections are taking place in a tranquil atmosphere and there is no thought of questioning their legitimacy. I am referring to Ghana, as the most recent example, but also to Nigeria, the Niger, Benin and Burkina Faso.

In The Gambia, the challenging of the results of the election by President Jammeh — even though he himself recognized them — was unanimously condemned by Economic Community of West African States, the African Union and the Security Council. They all called on Mr. Jammeh to respect the sovereign decision of his people and to agree to hand over power to President Barrow, in accordance with the Gambian Constitution. Since then, the countries of the region have spared no effort to reach a peaceful resolution to the crisis, pursuant to the charters of ECOWAS and of the African Union. The Heads of State and

Government of ECOWAS met on 17 December. The Peace and Security Council of the African Union met on 13 January specifically to deal with this topic. And the Security Council adopted a clear presidential statement (S/PRST/2016/19) on the matter.

France commends the tireless efforts of ECOWAS, the mediation efforts of President Buhari, President Johnson-Sirleaf, and President Mahama, who visited Banjul and have been in constant contact with Gambian stakeholders. In particular, we commend the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mohammed Ibn Chambas, who has done everything in his power to ensure a peaceful transition. We also welcome the efforts of Morocco and Mauritania, which, in a final push, used their diplomatic skills to ensure that President Jammeh accepted to step down from office in a dignified way at the end of his term.

We often refer in the Security Council to the need to strengthen preventive diplomacy. The Gambian crisis is an excellent example in that regard. No effort was spared by any of the actors involved to achieve a peaceful transition of power to the President-elect. At present, Mr. Jammeh continues to refuse to heed theoe appeals, in spite of all the guarantees provided by his successor to accord him the respect due him as former President of the Republic. Mr. Barrow took the oath of office this morning and today he is the legitimate President of The Gambia. That is why France thought that it was essential for the Security Council to make its position known and to adopt a resolution that sends a clear message to Mr. Jammeh today. We welcome the fact that resolution 2337 (2017) was adopted unanimously and that the Security Council has thereby expressed its full support to the efforts of the region to resolve this crisis.

Ms. Coleman (United States of America): The United States welcomes the adoption of resolution 2337 (2017). With the unanimous adoption of this resolution, the Security Council stands united in calling for a peaceful transition of power from one president to another; endorses the mediation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); and upholds the clear determination of ECOWAS and the African Union that the will of the Gambian people — clearly and peacefully expressed — must be respected.

The patience and commitment to peace demonstrated by Adama Barrow and the Gambian people since December have been remarkable. Gambian civil society organizations have refrained from violent demonstrations; instead, they have made their voices heard by issuing statements calling for a peaceful transfer of power. The Gambian people have placed their faith in ECOWAS and the international community to safeguard the integrity of the election, and we must not let them down.

We welcome the ECOWAS decisions from the fiftieth ordinary summit, held 17 December 2016 in Abuja. We applaud continued efforts by ECOWAS, the African Union and the United Nations to broker a peaceful transition, and call on all parties to exercise restraint and to avoid bloodshed. It is important that we support Adama Barrow, the democratic choice of the Gambian people. We are eager to work closely with Mr. Barrow and his team in order to help achieve the aspirations of the Gambian people.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): I would first like to thank the delegation of Senegal for its work on the text of resolution 2337 (2017). We support taking rapid action on the resolution, in the belief that the Council should make its voice heard in these crucial hours for the country's future and the stability of the region. We fully support the preventive diplomatic efforts that the international community, and especially The Gambia's neighbours, have been engaged in. We also commend the mediation by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the support of the African Union and the role played by Mr. Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa. All of that is proof of African ownership and leadership on the issue.

The about-face of former President Jammeh on the outcome of the presidential election, in which he was defeated, is deplorable. Today, however, the countries of West Africa and its subregional organizations are walking steadily along the path of democracy and the rule of law. At such a sensitive time, we would like to reiterate the urgings — of ECOWAS, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the African Union and the Security Council in today's resolution — that the Gambian army should respect the will of the people, support a peaceful and democratic transition of power to the new President and stand loyally by the side of the country's elected authority. Today Mr. Adama Barrow is the legitimate President of The Gambia. We congratulate him on the swearing-in ceremony that just took place and that we attended.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We also welcome the Council's unanimous adoption today of resolution 2337 (2017), and we appreciate the work done by our Senegalese colleagues, who have discharged their responsibilities with flexibility and resolve in drawing the Council's attention to the issue as early as possible. We have indeed been following the developments in The Gambia very closely. In line with the position of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union, Ethiopia fully supports respect for constitutional order in The Gambia and for a peaceful transfer of power aimed at preserving peace and stability there.

The political crisis in The Gambia could have serious ramifications not just for the country itself but for the entire region. We have seen how quickly things there have deteriorated and, for that reason, every possible effort must be made to ensure that it does not descend into chaos. The State institutions should not be allowed to collapse. While Ethiopia attaches great importance to that matter, we also believe that the usurpation of power and an unconstitutional move to retain it should not be allowed to succeed. In that regard, we are fully behind the ECOWAS regional efforts to resolve the current political impasse through dialogue, in full conformity with the country's Constitution and with respect for the will of the Gambian people. We believe that it is important to ensure that the Security Council supports the efforts of ECOWAS and the African Union and continues to send a unified message.

That is why Ethiopia supported the adoption of today's resolution. We commend Senegal for accommodating the concerns expressed by members during the negotiation process, with a view to facilitating the Council's unity. It is vital that we maintain that unity of purpose. We also salute all the members who showed the flexibility needed to ensure the resolution's adoption by consensus.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Egypt voted in favour of the Security Council's adoption today of resolution 2337 (2017), on the developments in The Gambia, because we hope that it will eventually help to achieve a breakthrough in the current political impasse there. We believe in the importance of the Council's aim, which is to promote and support the brave and principled positions of the regional Powers concerned, represented by the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States, and which also coincide with our deep-rooted belief in the necessity of finding African solutions to African crises.

Egypt joined the unanimous consensus on the resolution after the introduction of important improvements into the text, and in that regard I would like to thank the delegation of Senegal for its flexibility. We were anxious to see the inclusion in the resolution of wording reflecting one of the most important purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which is the peaceful settlement of disputes. We believe that efforts to achieve that should be exhaustive if we are to avoid chaos and uphold the principles of international law. However, in the light of the last amendment to the draft, which underlined the importance of a political settlement of the impasse in The Gambia, we are convinced that today's resolution does not endorse any mandatory automatic enforcement, as such processes require the Security Council's clear and unquestioned authorization, in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations.

In conclusion, Egypt hopes that the political crisis in The Gambia can be brought to an end through the assumption of office of the democratically chosen President-elect, Mr. Adama Barrow, because we badly need a shining example of a peaceful democratic transition of power on our continent that can ultimately enable it to create a bright future for its peoples.

Mr. Vitrenko (Ukraine) (*spoke in French*): Ukraine welcomes the Security Council's unanimous adoption today of resolution 2337 (2017). My delegation would also like to congratulate Mr. Adama Barrow, who was inaugurated today as the new President of the Islamic Republic of The Gambia. We hope he will soon be able to return to his country in order to complete the transition of power and begin fulfilling his duties so as to ensure peace and stability in the Gambia.

Since the announcement of the results of the presidential elections of 1 December, the international community has been working hard to convince the outgoing President to respect his country's Constitution. In that regard, we commend the efforts of the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and of Nigeria's President Buhari, as the ECOWAS mediator in The Gambia, Ghana's former President Manama and other regional leaders who have worked to resolve this impasse. We would also like to pay tribute to the role played by Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary

General for West Africa and the Sahel, and to thank the delegation of Senegal for its proactive efforts on the issue.

It is regrettable, however, that despite the clearly expressed will of the Gambian people and intensive efforts on the part of the international community, including the Security Council, to achieve a peaceful transition of power, the situation has deteriorated to the point that a Council resolution is needed. I want to emphasize that, in the light of recent developments, we must step up the diplomatic pressure and the political initiatives supporting it if we are to resolve the political crisis. The adoption of today's resolution is an integral part of those efforts to ensure peace in the Gambia and implement the election results.

In conclusion, we believe that right now the most critical immediate task is to convince Gambia's military and security actors to remain calm and refrain from any action that could lead to the deterioration of the country's human rights, security and humanitarian situation.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as representative of Sweden.

Sweden welcomes the Security Council's adoption today of resolution 2337 (2017) and its display of unity once again on The Gambia. I would like to add my voice to those expressing appreciation for the work of Senegal in that regard. The resolution affirms the Council's political support for Mr. Adama Barrow as the democratically elected President and legitimate representative of The Gambia. It is an important effort for conflict prevention on the part of the Council and a positive example of action under Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. The Council has given its political endorsement to the commitment of the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union to ensuring respect for the outcome of the election. It emphasizes that all stakeholders, inside and outside the Gambia, must exercise restraint and respect for the rule of law. We are confident that the regional mediators will continue working for a peaceful transition and the restoration of normalcy in the Gambia.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The meeting rose at 1.40 p.m.